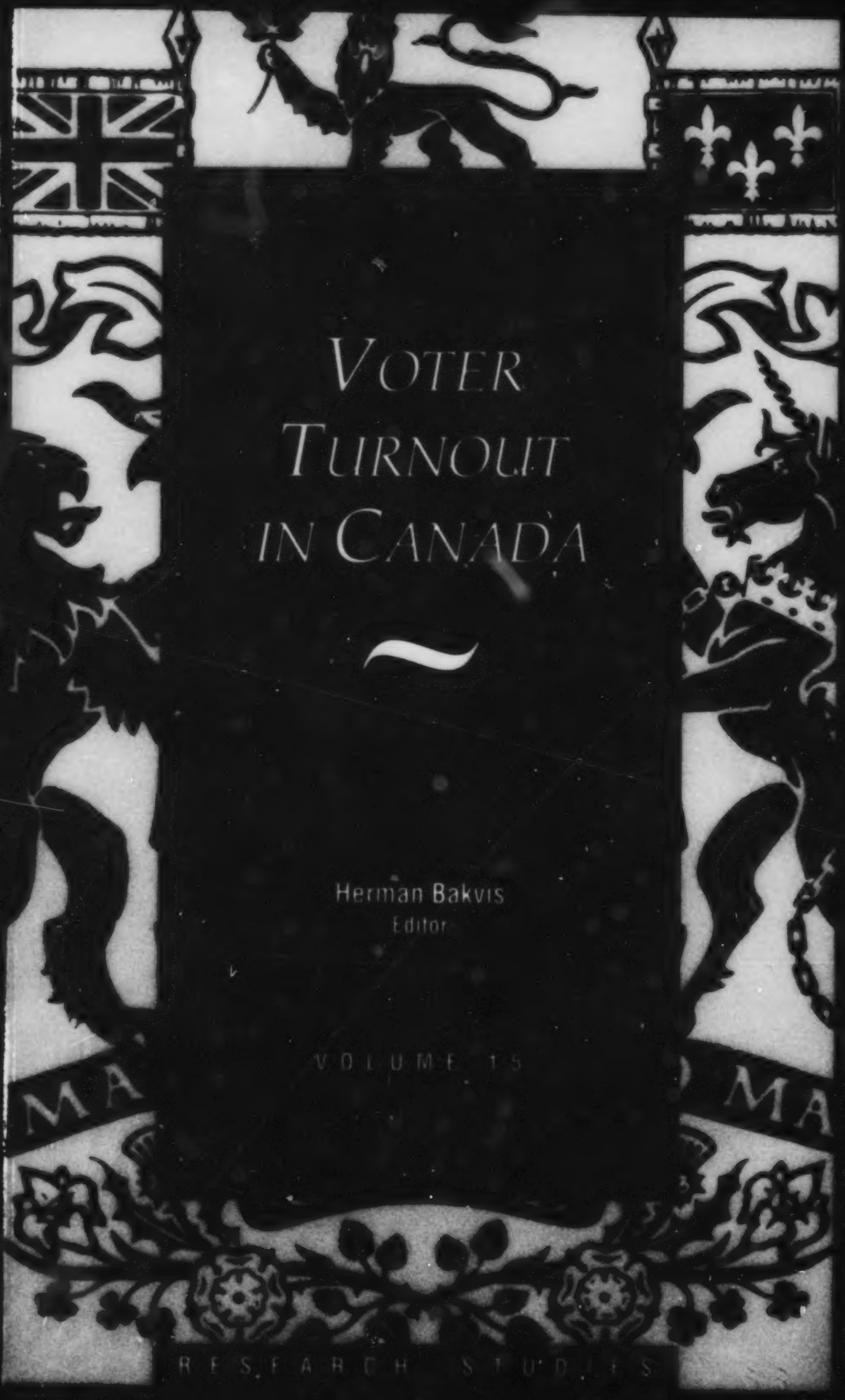

VOTER TURNOUT IN CANADA

~

Herman Bakvis
Editor

VOLUME 15

RESEARCH STUDIES

92-07271/

VOTER TURNOUT IN CANADA

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This is Volume 15 in a series of studies commissioned as part of the research program of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing

VOTER TURNOUT IN CANADA

~

Herman Bakvis
Editor

Volume 15 of the Research Studies

ROYAL COMMISSION ON ELECTORAL REFORM
AND PARTY FINANCING
AND CANADA COMMUNICATION GROUP –
PUBLISHING, SUPPLY AND SERVICES CANADA

DUNDURN PRESS
TORONTO AND OXFORD

© Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1991
Printed and bound in Canada
ISBN 1-55002-111-7
ISSN 1188-2743
Catalogue No. Z1-1989/2-41-15E

Published by Dundurn Press Limited in cooperation with the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing and Canada Communication Group – Publishing, Supply and Services Canada.

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Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:
Voter turnout in Canada

(Research studies ; 15)
Issued also in French under title: La Participation électorale au Canada.
ISBN 1-55002-111-7.

1. Elections – Canada – Statistics. 2. Voting – Canada. 3. Political participation – Canada. I. Bakvis, Herman, 1948– . II. Canada. Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. III. Series: Research studies (Canada. Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing) ; 15.

JL192.V68 1991 324.971 C91-090527-4

Dundurn Press Limited
2181 Queen Street East
Suite 301
Toronto, Canada
M4E 1E5

Dundurn Distribution
73 Lime Walk
Headington
Oxford, England
0X3 7AD

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FOREWORD

THE ROYAL COMMISSION on Electoral Reform and Party Financing was established in November 1989. Our mandate was to inquire into and report on the appropriate principles and process that should govern the election of members of the House of Commons and the financing of political parties and candidates' campaigns. To conduct such a comprehensive examination of Canada's electoral system, we held extensive public consultations and developed a research program designed to ensure that our recommendations would be guided by an independent foundation of empirical inquiry and analysis.

The Commission's in-depth review of the electoral system was the first of its kind in Canada's history of electoral democracy. It was dictated largely by the major constitutional, social and technological changes of the past several decades, which have transformed Canadian society, and their concomitant influence on Canadians' expectations of the political process itself. In particular, the adoption in 1982 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has heightened Canadians' awareness of their democratic and political rights and of the way they are served by the electoral system.

The importance of electoral reform cannot be overemphasized. As the Commission's work proceeded, Canadians became increasingly preoccupied with constitutional issues that have the potential to change the nature of Confederation. No matter what their beliefs or political allegiances in this continuing debate, Canadians agree that constitutional change must be achieved in the context of fair and democratic processes. We cannot complacently assume that our current electoral process will always meet this standard or that it leaves no room for improvement. Parliament and the national government must be seen as legitimate; electoral reform can both enhance the stature of national political institutions and reinforce their ability to define the future of our country in ways that command Canadians' respect and confidence and promote the national interest.

In carrying out our mandate, we remained mindful of the importance of protecting our democratic heritage, while at the same time balancing it against the emerging values that are injecting a new dynamic into the electoral system. If our system is to reflect the realities of Canadian political life, then reform requires more than mere tinkering with electoral laws and practices.

Our broad mandate challenged us to explore a full range of options. We commissioned more than 100 research studies, to be published in a 23-volume collection. In the belief that our electoral laws must measure up to the very best contemporary practice, we examined election-related laws and processes in all of our provinces and territories and studied comparable legislation and processes in established democracies around the world. This unprecedented array of empirical study and expert opinion made a vital contribution to our deliberations. We made every effort to ensure that the research was both intellectually rigorous and of practical value. All studies were subjected to peer review, and many of the authors discussed their preliminary findings with members of the political and academic communities at national symposiums on major aspects of the electoral system.

The Commission placed the research program under the able and inspired direction of Dr. Peter Aucoin, Professor of Political Science and Public Administration at Dalhousie University. We are confident that the efforts of Dr. Aucoin, together with those of the research coordinators and scholars whose work appears in this and other volumes, will continue to be of value to historians, political scientists, parliamentarians and policy makers, as well as to thoughtful Canadians and the international community.

Along with the other Commissioners, I extend my sincere gratitude to the entire Commission staff for their dedication and commitment. I also wish to thank the many people who participated in our symposiums for their valuable contributions, as well as the members of the research and practitioners' advisory groups whose counsel significantly aided our undertaking.

Pierre Lortie

Pierre Lortie
Chairman

INTRODUCTION

THE ROYAL COMMISSION'S research program constituted a comprehensive and detailed examination of the Canadian electoral process. The scope of the research, undertaken to assist Commissioners in their deliberations, was dictated by the broad mandate given to the Commission.

The objective of the research program was to provide Commissioners with a full account of the factors that have shaped our electoral democracy. This dictated, first and foremost, a focus on federal electoral law, but our inquiries also extended to the Canadian constitution, including the institutions of parliamentary government, the practices of political parties, the mass media and nonpartisan political organizations, as well as the decision-making role of the courts with respect to the constitutional rights of citizens. Throughout, our research sought to introduce a historical perspective in order to place the contemporary experience within the Canadian political tradition.

We recognized that neither our consideration of the factors shaping Canadian electoral democracy nor our assessment of reform proposals would be as complete as necessary if we failed to examine the experiences of Canadian provinces and territories and of other democracies. Our research program thus emphasized comparative dimensions in relation to the major subjects of inquiry.

Our research program involved, in addition to the work of the Commission's research coordinators, analysts and support staff, over 200 specialists from 28 universities in Canada, from the private sector and, in a number of cases, from abroad. Specialists in political science constituted the majority of our researchers, but specialists in law, economics, management, computer sciences, ethics, sociology and communications, among other disciplines, were also involved.

In addition to the preparation of research studies for the Commission, our research program included a series of research seminars, symposiums and workshops. These meetings brought together the Commissioners, researchers, representatives from the political parties, media personnel and others with practical experience in political parties, electoral politics and public affairs. These meetings provided not only a forum for discussion of the various subjects of the Commission's mandate, but also an opportunity for our research to be assessed by those with an intimate knowledge of the world of political practice.

These public reviews of our research were complemented by internal and external assessments of each research report by persons qualified in the area; such assessments were completed prior to our decision to publish any study in the series of research volumes.

The Research Branch of the Commission was divided into several areas, with the individual research projects in each area assigned to the research coordinators as follows:

F. Leslie Seidle	Political Party and Election Finance
Herman Bakvis	Political Parties
Kathy Megyery	Women, Ethno-Cultural Groups and Youth
David Small	Redistribution; Electoral Boundaries; Voter Registration
Janet Hiebert	Party Ethics
Michael Cassidy	Democratic Rights; Election Administration
Robert A. Milen	Aboriginal Electoral Participation and Representation
Frederick J. Fletcher	Mass Media and Broadcasting in Elections
David Mac Donald (Assistant Research Coordinator)	Direct Democracy

These coordinators identified appropriate specialists to undertake research, managed the projects and prepared them for publication. They also organized the seminars, symposiums and workshops in their research areas and were responsible for preparing presentations and briefings to help the Commission in its deliberations and decision making. Finally, they participated in drafting the Final Report of the Commission.

On behalf of the Commission, I welcome the opportunity to thank the following for their generous assistance in producing these research studies – a project that required the talents of many individuals.

In performing their duties, the research coordinators made a notable contribution to the work of the Commission. Despite the pressures of tight deadlines, they worked with unfailing good humour and the utmost congeniality. I thank all of them for their consistent support and cooperation.

In particular, I wish to express my gratitude to Leslie Seidle, senior research coordinator, who supervised our research analysts and support staff in Ottawa. His diligence, commitment and professionalism not only set high standards, but also proved contagious. I am grateful to Kathy Megyery, who performed a similar function in Montreal with equal aplomb and skill. Her enthusiasm and dedication inspired us all.

On behalf of the research coordinators and myself, I wish to thank our research analysts: Daniel Arsenault, Eric Bertram, Cécile Boucher, Peter Constantinou, Yves Denoncourt, David Docherty, Luc Dumont, Jane Dunlop, Scott Evans, Véronique Garneau, Keith Heintzman, Paul Holmes, Hugh Mellon, Cheryl D. Mitchell, Donald Padget, Alain Pelletier, Dominique Tremblay and Lisa Young. The Research Branch was strengthened by their ability to carry out research in a wide variety of areas, their intellectual curiosity and their team spirit.

The work of the research coordinators and analysts was greatly facilitated by the professional skills and invaluable cooperation of Research Branch staff members: Paulette LeBlanc, who, as administrative assistant, managed the flow of research projects; Hélène Leroux, secretary to the research coordinators, who produced briefing material for the Commissioners and who, with Lori Nazar, assumed responsibility for monitoring the progress of research projects in the latter stages of our work; Kathleen McBride and her assistant Natalie Brose, who created and maintained the database of briefs and hearings transcripts; and Richard Herold and his assistant Susan Dancause, who were responsible for our research library. Jacinthe Séguin and Cathy Tucker also deserve thanks – in addition to their duties as receptionists, they assisted in a variety of ways to help us meet deadlines.

We were extremely fortunate to obtain the research services of first-class specialists from the academic and private sectors. Their contributions are found in this and the other 22 published research volumes. We thank them for the quality of their work and for their willingness to contribute and to meet our tight deadlines.

Our research program also benefited from the counsel of Jean-Marc Hamel, Special Adviser to the Chairman of the Commission and former

Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, whose knowledge and experience proved invaluable.

In addition, numerous specialists assessed our research studies. Their assessments not only improved the quality of our published studies, but also provided us with much-needed advice on many issues. In particular, we wish to single out professors Donald Blake, Janine Brodie, Alan Cairns, Kenneth Carty, John Courtney, Peter Desbarats, Jane Jenson, Richard Johnston, Vincent Lemieux, Terry Morley and Joseph Wearing, as well as Ms. Beth Symes.

Producing such a large number of studies in less than a year requires a mastery of the skills and logistics of publishing. We were fortunate to be able to count on the Commission's Director of Communications, Richard Rochefort, and Assistant Director, Hélène Papineau. They were ably supported by the Communications staff: Patricia Burden, Louise Dagenais, Caroline Field, Claudine Labelle, France Langlois, Lorraine Maheux, Ruth McVeigh, Chantal Morissette, Sylvie Patry, Jacques Poitras and Claudette Rouleau-O'Toole.

To bring the project to fruition, the Commission also called on specialized contractors. We are deeply grateful for the services of Ann McCoomb (references and fact checking); Marthe Lemery, Pierre Chagnon and the staff of Communications Com'ça (French quality control); Norman Bloom, Pamela Riseborough and associates of B&B Editorial Consulting (English adaptation and quality control); and Mado Reid (French production). Al Albania and his staff at Acart Graphics designed the studies and produced some 2 400 tables and figures.

The Commission's research reports constitute Canada's largest publishing project of 1991. Successful completion of the project required close cooperation between the public and private sectors. In the public sector, we especially acknowledge the excellent service of the Privy Council unit of the Translation Bureau, Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, under the direction of Michel Parent, and our contacts Ruth Steele and Terry Denovan of the Canada Communication Group, Department of Supply and Services.

The Commission's co-publisher for the research studies was Dundurn Press of Toronto, whose exceptional service is gratefully acknowledged. Wilson & Lafleur of Montreal, working with the Centre de Documentation Juridique du Québec, did equally admirable work in preparing the French version of the studies.

Teams of editors, copy editors and proofreaders worked diligently under stringent deadlines with the Commission and the publishers to prepare some 20 000 pages of manuscript for design, typesetting and printing. The work of these individuals, whose names are listed elsewhere in this volume, was greatly appreciated.

Our acknowledgements extend to the contributions of the Commission's Executive Director, Guy Goulard, and the administration and executive support teams: Maurice Lacasse, Denis Lafrance and Steve Tremblay (finance); Thérèse Lacasse and Mary Guy-Shea (personnel); Cécile Desforges (assistant to the Executive Director); Marie Dionne (administration); Anna Bevilacqua (records); and support staff members Michelle Bélanger, Roch Langlois, Michel Lauzon, Jean Mathieu, David McKay and Pierrette McMurtie, as well as Denise Miquelon and Christiane Séguin of the Montreal office.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to Marlène Girard, assistant to the Chairman. Her ability to supervise the logistics of the Commission's work amid the tight schedules of the Chairman and Commissioners contributed greatly to the completion of our task.

I also wish to express my deep gratitude to my own secretary, Liette Simard. Her superb administrative skills and great patience brought much-appreciated order to my penchant for the chaotic workstyle of academe. She also assumed responsibility for the administrative coordination of revisions to the final drafts of volumes 1 and 2 of the Commission's Final Report. I owe much to her efforts and assistance.

Finally, on behalf of the research coordinators and myself, I wish to thank the Chairman, Pierre Lortie, the members of the Commission, Pierre Fortier, Robert Gabor, William Knight and Lucie Pépin, and former members Elwood Cowley and Senator Donald Oliver. We are honoured to have worked with such an eminent and thoughtful group of Canadians, and we have benefited immensely from their knowledge and experience. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the creativity, intellectual rigour and energy our Chairman brought to our task. His unparalleled capacity to challenge, to bring out the best in us, was indeed inspiring.

Peter Aucoin
Director of Research

PREFACE

THE ACT OF VOTING in an election is perhaps the single most important form of political participation in modern democracies. It remains the most direct means available to citizens of signalling their interests and preferences to government and of controlling those who seek to govern them. The extent to which citizens exercise this most fundamental right can be seen as an indicator of the health of democracy. A low level of voter turnout can be taken as indicative of political alienation among a good proportion of the populace; as a consequence, elected leaders may not be seen as fully legitimate. A lack of confidence when manifested through low voter turnout may also affect the legitimacy of basic political institutions. Conversely, high voter turnout can be construed as evidence of both a high level of commitment to the political order and the existence of a citizenry interested in the welfare of their nation.

Many Canadians are under the impression that this country enjoys high levels of voter turnout. In the postwar period, turnout for federal elections has been approximately 75 percent, with limited fluctuations occurring from election to election. Common wisdom has it that this rate is commendably high. As the studies in this volume demonstrate, however, this is a misconception. While Canada's rate of voter turnout compares favourably with that of the United States, a wider comparison reveals that Canada has generally ranked in the bottom half among all democracies and, in recent years, in the bottom quarter. By and large, the gap in turnout rate between Canada and other countries is growing. As the study by Jerome Black in this volume notes, a number of the newer democracies now have rates that exceed those in Canada.

In seeking to come to grips with the underlying reasons for the relatively low Canadian figure, and with how the turnout rate might be improved, three separate studies on this issue were commissioned as part of the research program of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Two related questions are of particular importance. First, to what extent does the administration of elections themselves – the means of registering voters, the hours of voting, the location of polling stations – inhibit or promote turnout? Second, could changes of an administrative or institutional nature enhance turnout?

The first study, by Munroe Eagles, relies on aggregate data (i.e., census data combined with constituency-level turnout data from Elections Canada) to examine some of the basic structural determinants of voter turnout. He finds that turnout is negatively correlated with population mobility and the proportion of low-income families and Aboriginal people in a riding. It is positively correlated with the proportion of university graduates and professionals in each constituency. There are pronounced regional differences, disparities that go well beyond variations in income or economic well-being. At the same time, there is little difference between urban and rural constituencies. Nor, as is sometimes thought, are time zone differences accountable for the lower turnout in some of the western provinces. Political variables, such as the number of campaign dollars spent in constituencies or the competitiveness of the constituency contest, have only a very limited effect on turnout.

Some of the findings by Eagles are similar to those uncovered by Jon Pammett, whose study of voter turnout uses survey data. Using the Canadian National Election Studies and Gallup polls covering more than two decades, Pammett is able to provide a more detailed understanding of the relationship between social structure and voter turnout, as well as between political attitudes and turnout. The positive effects of education and socio-economic status are confirmed. So too are the regional differences, some of which are quite pronounced. For example, there is a spread in voter turnout of more than 15 percent between Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. The most important variable, however, according to Pammett, is age. Younger electors are much less likely to exercise their right to vote. On the attitudinal dimension, non-voters are much more likely to be uninterested in politics and to feel that their vote is unlikely to have an effect on the outcome of the election. While these attitudinal correlates are perhaps not surprising in themselves, they do underscore the fact that non-voting is an indicator of political alienation.

These findings roughly parallel those in other countries. Two issues stand out in the Pammett study, however. First, Pammett's research shows there can be considerable differences in turnout between specific categories of voters, suggesting that the impact of sociological factors may have been underestimated in earlier studies. For example, a married professional who lives in Prince Edward Island and is a member of the United Church is more than twice as likely to vote as a single agnostic university student who is resident in British Columbia. Second, these factors notwithstanding, Pammett is also able to probe the reasons that individuals themselves gave for not voting. In particular he is able to identify those voters who cited administrative reasons for not voting, such as lacking access to polling stations or being away during the election. Using this information he is able to draw a distinction between those he refers to as "disinterested" non-voters and those who were "administratively disenfranchised." Assuming that a proportion of the latter, as well as a smaller proportion of the former, would be likely to vote if the voting process were made more accessible both before and on election day, Pammett estimates that the turnout rate for federal general elections might be increased by as much as 7 percent.

As Pammett emphasizes, these projections, based on certain assumptions, are far from definitive. They are nonetheless suggestive, and the notion that administrative and institutional arrangements are important determinants of turnout rates is strongly corroborated in Jerome Black's detailed comparative study of the issue. The primary theme of his research is that institutions and rules do matter. Using data specially collected for his study on more than 30 democracies over several elections, he examines both broad institutional features, such as the difference between a variety of electoral systems (e.g., proportional representation, single-member plurality system), and specific rules concerning accessibility. Black argues that liberalizing the rules governing the voting process and generally making it easier for people to cast their vote will increase turnout. Two cases stand out. In Sweden, in excess of 30 percent of ballots are cast *before* the election itself in the form of advance voting. This appears to account for the fact that the turnout rate in Sweden is higher than the norm and has increased since the system was made more open. In New Zealand, special efforts are made to locate polling stations where people are likely to congregate, such as in shopping malls and at race-tracks, and to allow people to vote at stations other than those in their constituencies. According to Black, partially as a result of this, New Zealand has one of the highest turnout rates among those democracies without compulsory voting. New Zealand does have a mandatory voter registration system, which may also contribute to the higher turnout rate.

All three studies, but particularly those by Black and Pammett, make specific suggestions for institutional and administrative changes to increase voter turnout in Canada: these relate to voting hours, location of polling stations and more flexible arrangements for advance polling. Some suggestions, such as Sunday voting, may not be acceptable to many Canadians, judging from some of the representations that were made before the Commission. It is also significant that the researchers do not recommend compulsory voting. In not advancing this proposal, the three researchers are no doubt reflecting Canadian mores and sensibilities in this regard. George Orwell once reportedly said that surely one of our more fundamental freedoms exists in the right to say no. An increase in voter turnout that is brought about through a law making it an offence not to cast a vote is unlikely to foster the desired increase in the legitimacy of the voting process. The overall thrust of the implicit and explicit recommendations in all three studies in this volume is to increase the legitimacy of the system by doing all that is reasonably possible to give citizens free and unfettered access to the voting process.

Volume 15 forms part of the Commission's publication program, reflecting the importance that the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing attached to original research activities to support its deliberations and recommendations.

As with any multifaceted research undertaking, the completion of this volume, one of 23, is due in no small measure to the help and cooperation of several individuals. To begin, I would like to thank the authors of the research reports, first, for agreeing to contribute their knowledge and expertise, in many instances on short notice, and second, for their cooperation in meeting the deadlines that the exigencies of the Commission imposed. Their task entailed not simply crafting the research studies but also making presentations to the Commission and at research seminars, and responding to requests for information during the time that the Commission's report was being prepared.

Several other individuals in universities, political parties, government and the nongovernment sector assisted by acting as peer reviewers and participants at the research seminars, or by simply being available as resource persons when crucial information was needed on specialized topics. Their willingness to give freely of their time is much appreciated. In particular I would like to thank Grant Amyot, Donald Blake, Kenneth Carty, William Chandler, Jane Jenson, Richard Johnston, Hugh Thorburn and Steven Wolinetz, who willingly shared their time and wisdom on several occasions throughout the life of the Commission.

In addition, I gratefully acknowledge the excellent help and support received from the staff at the Commission in Ottawa and Montreal. They include Paulette LeBlanc, Hélène Leroux, Lori Nazar and Liette Simard, who ensured that the flow of research reports between the coordinator, the researchers and the reviewers moved along appropriate channels and in an expeditious fashion; Richard Herold and Susan Dancause, custodians of the Commission's library; Kathleen McBride, the information system specialist; and Eric Bertram, Peter Constantinou, Keith Heintzman, Hugh Mellon and Donald Padget, the research analysts of the Commission, who spent many late hours preparing background material as well as a number of the research studies. The work of one individual in particular, David Mac Donald, assistant research coordinator with the Commission, proved invaluable in numerous ways, but especially during the preparation of presentations based on the research for consideration by the Commission. To each and every one of them, I would like to extend my appreciation for a job well done.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to the director of research, Peter Aucoin, the Commissioners, Pierre Fortier, Robert Gabor, William Knight and Lucie Pépin, and, above all, the Chairman, Pierre Lortie, for the opportunity of working with them and for sharing with me their erudition and experiences concerning that most fascinating of all worlds – the internal workings and dynamics of political parties.

Herman Bakvis
Research Coordinator

VOTER TURNOUT IN CANADA

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1

VOTING AND NON-VOTING IN CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS

An Ecological Analysis

Munroe Eagles

AFTER DECADES OF neglect, scholarly attention is increasingly being directed at the question of political participation. One focal point in this research has been the question of turnout at elections. While voting is the most commonly performed citizen political activity, routinely between 20 and 30 percent of the eligible electorate fails to vote in Canadian federal elections (Scarrow 1967a; Mishler 1979, table 2.2). Although non-voting is less of a problem in Canada than in some other countries (notably, for example, the United States), an understanding of why some Canadians go to the polls on election day while others do not is clearly important to an assessment of the health and vitality of Canada's political system.

Although constituencies form the basis of Canada's system of parliamentary democracy (a national election is in essence a collection of constituency races held simultaneously), surprisingly little is known about the determinants of voter turnout at this level. The shifting methodological preferences of political scientists account for at least part of this gap in our knowledge. At least since the 1960s in Canada, political scientists have tended to rely on the results of sample surveys to explore the effects of such individual-level correlates of political participation as political efficacy, political interest, age, income, education and partisan identification, to mention only a few (Mishler 1979; Clarke et al. 1984, 139–47). This study attempts to advance understanding of this overlooked dimension of Canadian electoral politics.

The distinguished tradition of survey research on electoral participation has added greatly to our understanding of differences in the propensity of potential electors to vote, but for several reasons these analyses fall short of providing full accounts of the question of voting/non-voting. In what follows, a case for the importance of an aggregate-level, or "ecological,"[1] understanding of voter turnout will be advanced, first in the abstract and subsequently in the context of an intensive analysis of constituency patterns in turnout at the last three federal elections in Canada (1980, 1984, 1988). For the latter, two complementary models of constituency-level variations in voter turnout, one focusing on the socio-economic and the other on political mobilization characteristics of different ridings, will be evaluated. The primary goal of the study is thus to complement the individual-level research currently popular by identifying significant aggregate (or ecological) determinants of voting turnout.

WHY AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TURNOUT?

In light of the current preference for survey-based explanation, it is worthwhile to begin by briefly outlining a rationale for the ecological approach adopted here. The case can be built, both with reference to the methodological shortcomings of survey applications to questions of electoral participation, and by identifying the particular strengths of aggregate data, for such investigations.

First, a major limitation facing survey-based analyses of turnout concerns their limited geographic coverage. Virtually all surveys employ some clustering to reduce interviewing costs, and this has the effect of selecting individuals from a limited subset of constituencies. Efficiency normally dictates that respondents from far-flung regions of the country are not included in most sampling frames. Not only does this clustering restrict the scope of spatial variations that can appear in survey-based research, but the relatively small number of respondents selected from various regional clusters renders the study of intra-national geographic variations tentative and subject to large sample errors. Ecological analyses based on aggregate data have the distinct advantage of including all ridings and all voters, regardless of their place of residence.

Second, research in Canada and abroad indicates that overreporting of voting occurs in virtually all surveys (e.g., see Wiseman 1986, 23; Crewe et al. 1977, 46), and this counsels caution in relying solely on the kind of self-reported turnout measures customarily available from opinion surveys. One important explanation for the persistent overestimation of turnout rates in survey research stems from an apparent reluctance on the part of non-voting respondents to admit, in an interview, to being less-than-model citizens (for more thorough discussions of this problem, see Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, appendix A, 115–18; Swaddle and Heath 1989). Survey analyses of voting and non-voting, therefore, are likely to be tainted by (among other things) this incarnation of the more general problem of a social desirability bias in survey response. In contrast, the turnout figures utilized in aggregate analyses are based on actual (as opposed to reported) behaviour and are as reliable as the electoral system can provide.[2]

Finally, the case for ecological analyses of turnout can be put more positively by drawing attention to the strengths of this approach. Previous research has found that turnout levels are responsive to a wide variety of factors in addition to the kind of individual characteristics that are readily measurable using surveys (for an overview and recent critique, see Milbrath and Goel 1977, 123–43; Lane and Ersson 1990). In other words, *ceteris paribus,* identical individuals might well differ in their decision to vote or not, depending on these qualities of their sociopolitical environment. A partial list of these environmental factors would include characteristics of the legal framework of the electoral process (e.g., Crewe 1981; Powell 1986); riding-level electoral marginality and the intensity of party competitiveness (Scarrow 1967b; Denver and Hands 1985; Irvine 1976); community cohesiveness (Eagles and Erfle 1989); group memberships and interests (Uhlaner 1989a); interpersonal environments (Straits 1990; Uhlaner 1989b); and third-party activity (Denver and Hands 1985; Mughan 1986, 52–55). Since constituency-level aggregate data necessarily pertain to at least some of these environmental characteristics, ecological analyses based on them are especially well suited to assess the impact of these extra-individual correlates of political participation.

Research Design and Methodology

To reiterate, this research study attempts to measure and explain the influence of several group-level factors on levels of voter turnout. After a general overview of some conventional lore regarding turnout at the polls, attention is focused on the 1980, 1984 and 1988 elections. There are several reasons for this restrictive temporal focus.

First, an inspection of the national turnout figures from 1896 to 1988 presented in table 1.1 (i) reveals that there are no clearly identifiable long-term trends in turnout that necessitate a more extensive time-series analysis. Furthermore, the three elections considered here include a reasonable range of turnout levels (the 1980 election had the lowest turnout rate since 1953, while the 1984 and 1988 elections saw turnout

Table 1.1
Voter turnout at federal elections, 1896–1988: general patterns

(i) Canada-wide historical patterns

Year	Turnout (%)	Year	Turnout (%)
1896	62	1953	67
1900	77	1957	74
1904	72	1958	79
1908	70	1962	79
1911	70	1963	79
1917	77	1965	75
1921	68	1968	76
1925	66	1972	77
1926	68	1974	71
1930	76	1979	76
1935	75	1980	69
1940	70	1984	75
1945	75	1988	75
1949	74		

(ii) Interprovincial variations in average turnout since 1896

	Average turnout (%)	No. of elections*
Newfoundland (post-1949)	63.7	14
Prince Edward Island	82.9	23
Nova Scotia	75.7	27
New Brunswick	76.1	27
Quebec	72.6	27
Ontario	73.1	27
Manitoba	72.9	27
Saskatchewan (post-1911)	76.2	23
Alberta (post-1911)	68.7	23
British Columbia	70.9	27

Sources: 1896–1974 figures taken from Mishler (1979, table 2.2, p. 31). Data for 1979–88 are from Canada, Elections Canada (1980a, 1980b, 1984a, 1988a).

rates return to slightly above average levels). Thus, while it is concerned with a relatively brief period of time, the focus here does include significant cross-election variability in turnout.

Second, geographic variability in turnout levels, though relatively modest, is normally greater than are differences observed over time. A general indication of this can be taken from table 1.1 (ii). Here the range of *average* turnout across provinces is 19 percent (as compared with the 17 percent range in national turnout levels over the period between 1896 and 1988). Turnout tends to be lowest in Newfoundland, followed by Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec. While further analysis of regional differences in turnout will follow later, it is tempting to speculate that the lower-than-average levels of turnout in these provinces may be related to their long-term tendency to one-party dominance.

Sizable as the provincial differences in turnout are, however, constituency variability in turnout is still larger. For example, the gap in turnout between the highest and lowest constituencies in the 1988 election was 29 percent (see appendix for the means and standard deviations for constituency turnout levels at the last three elections). The decision to focus analytical attention on spatial rather than temporal variability in turnout clearly seems defensible.

Two models are advanced below to account for geographic differences in turnout. The first model tests the relationship of socio-economic variables and turnout, while the second explores for the impact of variations in the intensity of political mobilization on turnout. A fuller discussion of these models and their component variables will be given shortly. The parameters of these models are estimated using familiar "ordinary least squares" regression techniques. Data for this purpose have been collected from a variety of sources. Information on the socio-economic characteristics of federal constituencies has been taken from the 1981 and 1986 census tabulations (Canada, Statistics Canada 1983, 1988).[3] Constituency-level election returns were taken from the published reports of Elections Canada (Canada, Elections Canada 1980b, 1984a, 1988a). Data on election expenses were also taken from a series of reports from the chief electoral officer (Canada, Elections Canada 1980c, 1984b, 1988b).

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ABOUT VARIATIONS IN TURNOUT

While research into aggregate patterns of voter turnout in Canada is not well developed, most pundits and analysts share several pieces of folk wisdom that deserve some brief examination. For example, it is widely believed that the country's extreme climate has generated seasonal variations in turnout (e.g., Wearing 1988, 77). Winter elections should be associated with lower levels of turnout, reflecting the greater difficulty of conducting an intensive campaign and the likelihood that voters may experience difficulty getting to the polls on election day. Contests held during vacation time in the summer are also expected to draw poorly, since voters' minds are likely to be fixed on other (more enjoyable) seasonal pursuits. The highest rates of turnout should be found in spring and autumn contests.

Table 1.2 (i) presents some supportive evidence for this lore. The sole winter election held since 1896 (February 1980) attracted only 69 percent of the eligible electorate to the polls. Winter's chill is not the only explanation for this low turnout, however. Regardless of the season, voters may have been disinclined to go to the polls again less than a year after the previous election (held in May 1979) to choose between essentially the same slate of candidates and leaders. Furthermore, the Liberal party's initial lead of 20 percent in the opinion polls when that election was called probably contributed to voter apathy. For the other seasons, the expected variations are observed. Summer campaigns draw fewer voters to the polls than either spring or autumn elections, though the average seasonal differences in turnout are hardly overwhelming.

Another commonplace belief regarding variations in turnout levels follows from the perspective that elections express collective judgements on the performance of the previous government (Key 1966; Fiorina 1981). Some holding this view argue that turnout ought to run higher when the electorate is dissatisfied with the government's performance. In other words, the incentives to punish an incumbent government for a poor performance (i.e., to "throw the rascals out") may be more effective in drawing voters to the polls than are incentives to reward successful governments. At the extreme, this kind of retrospective ground swell can lead to a "critical election," characterized by high turnout and a realignment of social forces behind parties (Burnham 1970, 7–8). On the other hand, the relative stability of aggregate turnout figures over time in Canada has been interpreted as one of the supports for the long periods of one-party dominance witnessed in this country's recent political history (Scarrow 1967b, 113).

According to this view, turnout at elections in which the incumbent party is replaced in government (deviating elections) should be higher than in contests where the incumbent party retains office (maintaining elections).[4] Table 1.2 (ii) reveals that this has generally not been the case over almost the past 100 years of Canadian history. In fact, the average turnout at maintaining elections has been marginally higher than at deviating elections during this period. It seems likely that more powerful influences are at work in affecting turnout levels over time.

Table 1.2
Some conventional wisdom examined: seasonal, partisan and rural-urban influences on turnout

	Average turnout (%)	No. of elections
(i) Seasonal variation since 1896[a]		
Spring elections (21 Mar. – 20 June)	76	7
Summer elections (21 June – 20 Sept.)	71	9
Autumn elections (21 Sept. – 20 Dec.)	73	10
Winter elections (21 Dec. – 20 Mar.)	69	1
Average (1896–1988)	73	27
(ii) Maintaining and deviating elections since 1896[a]		
Maintaining elections	73	17
Deviating elections	72	10

		Average turnout (%)	No. of ridings
(iii) Rural and urban differences since 1980[b]			
Election			
1980	Rural	70.1	132
	Urban	68.8	150
1984	Rural	75.5	132
	Urban	75.6	150
1988	Rural	75.5	137
	Urban	75.2	158

[a] 1896–1974 figures taken from Mishler (1979, table 2.2, p. 31). Data for 1979–88 are from Canada, Elections Canada (1980a, 1980b, 1984a, 1988a).

[b] The rural-urban partition of constituencies was based on the proportion of the workforce employed in the primary sector industries of agriculture, fishing and forestry. For both the 1981 and 1986 censuses, 4% was used as the threshold: those ridings with less than 4% of the labour force in the three primary sectors were classed as urban, while those above the 4% figure were classed as rural.

Observers of Canadian elections have also noted that turnout in rural communities is generally higher than in urban areas (Milbrath and Goel 1977, 106–10; Scarrow 1967b, 108–10). Several plausible causal agents can be advanced to explain the rural-urban differential. Scarrow, for instance, used a Quebec example to argue that turnout was lower in the safer urban seats of Montreal (because of "safe seat apathy") than in the more marginal rural ridings. His argument may not hold beyond Quebec, however, since Grossman's (1967) analysis of Ontario ridings suggested that safe seats were most likely to be found in rural areas. Perhaps a more plausible explanation for higher rural turnouts would interpret the differential as a consequence of group pressures to vote that are more efficacious in the smaller, intimate rural communities where residents are prone to know one another and to interact socially.

While a full exploration of the putative rural-urban differential in turnout must involve controls for other potentially contaminating influences (as undertaken shortly), a simple indication of its magnitude can be taken by partitioning the ridings into "rural" and "urban" categories and comparing turnout levels at recent elections (for the results of a similar procedure for the period 1925–58, see Scarrow 1967b, 108–109). While it would have been preferable to use population density figures to classify ridings as urban or rural, this information was not available for all constituencies at each election. Instead, the proportion of the workforce engaged in the agricultural, forestry and fishing sectors was taken as an indicator of rural or urban status.[5]

Table 1.2 (iii) contains the results of such a test for the 1980–88 period. Clearly, whatever forces were responsible for the higher turnouts associated with rural Canada earlier in this century must have eroded by the 1980s. In none of the three elections held in the 1980s is the rural-urban differential in turnout large, and in the 1984 contest the urban turnouts were marginally higher than in ridings classed as rural.

A final part of the conventional wisdom regarding turnout concerns the reputedly low turnout at by-elections (Scarrow 1967a, 46). Table 1.3 strikingly bears this out for by-elections in the 1980s. Turnout at the 21 by-elections over the past decade ran between 10 and 30 percent lower

Table 1.3
Turnout at by-elections since 1980

Year	Turnout (%)	No. of by-elections
1980	57.4	1
1981	60.6	5
1982	66.1	3
1983	64.3	3
1986	58.5	2
1987	56.4	3
1988	59.5	1
1989	52.2	1
1990	45.2	2

Source: Compiled from various Elections Canada reports on by-elections; 1990 figures were obtained by personal communication with Elections Canada and are, at time of writing, unverified.

than at general elections. Undoubtedly, a variety of factors accounts for this by-election–general election differential in turnout. By-elections lack the national intensity and the sense of high stakes associated with general elections. Voters are not as exposed to high-priced national advertising campaigns, and election fever cannot spill over from riding to riding. Unlike general elections, where the results are uncertain until after the polls close on election day, by-elections rarely produce a change in the government. Therefore, lower turnouts at by-elections are not particularly surprising.

MULTIVARIATE MODELS OF VOTER TURNOUT

While conventional understanding of the determinants of variation in voter turnout discussed above are interesting and revealing, full explanations must measure a variety of influences simultaneously. As mentioned earlier, two broad sets of factors can be hypothesized to account for differences in constituency-level turnout. First, a rich vein of survey research has established a variety of strong socio-economic correlates of political participation (e.g., Verba and Nie 1972, 125; Milbrath and Goel 1977, 96; Mishler 1979, 88–97). The well-to-do are equipped with the requisite time, energy and political resources to participate effectively in the political arena. On the other hand, those lower in the status and socio-economic hierarchy are less likely to possess the requisite resources and less likely to expect to be effective in influencing political decisions.

The socio-economic model of turnout suggests that levels of income, occupational status and education will vary positively and significantly with levels of turnout. Some research suggests, however, that the effect of such influences on turnout levels is less for voting than it is for other, more demanding forms of participation (Mishler 1979, 92; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 13–36, also emphasize the weak relationship of socio-economic status and turnout). Thus, while a positive relationship is anticipated in the tests that follow, the effect of these variables on turnout may not be particularly great. To examine this question, three indicators of socio-economic status of a riding's residents are included in the multivariate model. They are the proportion of low-income families in each riding (expected to depress the level of turnout), the percentage of residents who are university graduates and the proportion of the labour force working in professional, administrative and managerial occupations (both expected to correlate positively with turnout). Naturally, these three factors are interrelated (for example, the zero-order correlation between university degrees and managerial and administrative occupations is approximately .75; see appendix, table 1.A2 for a full correlation matrix of all variables). Care must be taken in treating these three variables as empirically distinct in their effects on voting turnout.

The propensity to vote has also been associated with a variety of life-cycle influences. Other things being equal, young people and the residentially mobile generally have lower probabilities of voting (e.g., see Squire et al. 1987). Age effects are difficult to estimate using aggregate data, since the generations (like gender groups) tend to be distributed relatively evenly across geographic space. Ridings do vary considerably in terms of the stability of their residential bases, however. Some areas, such as rapidly growing suburban communities, contain relatively high proportions of new residents, and these communities will likely exhibit lower turnout levels. Newcomers are less likely than established residents to have acquired the local knowledge and ties to community that have been shown to enhance levels of political participation.

Unfortunately, comparable measures of residential stability are not available for either the 1981 or the 1986 census. In the 1981 census, the "median length of occupancies" (in years) is the best indicator of the relative stability of population base. The analysis of the 1988 election (using the 1986 census) employs the proportion of households in a riding who report having moved home during the past five years. In both cases, the socio-economic model hypothesizes that turnout will be highest among the most residentially stable ridings (a positive coefficient for the former, a negative coefficient for the latter). As outlined earlier, the socio-economic model suggests that turnout will be higher in more rural ridings.

Finally, although data limitations preclude a full analysis, it is also expected that turnout levels will vary according to several aspects of the ethnocultural composition of Canada's constituencies. Specifically, constituency levels of turnout are expected to vary inversely with the proportion of residents who are members of Canada's indigenous peoples. The escalating political frustration of this group has already established itself as an important development in Canadian politics during this decade. In part, the attractiveness of direct and militant action may reflect the relatively recent and incomplete integration of this community into the "normal" channels of Canadian politics, including the federal electoral system. For example, Inuit citizens were not given the vote until 1934, and Indian people living on reserves were not enfranchised until 1960. While patterns of turnout among the Inuit do not appear to differ greatly from national norms (Loveday and Jaensch 1987, 36), it should not be surprising to find that for some reserves, at least, turnout for federal elections is lower than for band elections (Van Wageningen 1988). Accordingly, the socio-economic model hypothesizes that as the proportion of Aboriginal people in a riding increases, the level of turnout diminishes.

Another aspect of the ethnocultural make-up of Canada that will likely have a bearing on the levels of voting concerns the growing presence of immigrants and non-citizens. The relationship between the proportion of a riding's residents who are immigrants and its level of voter turnout is likely to be complex. On the one hand, recent immigrants may find the norms and practices of Canadian electoral politics complex and forbidding. Others in the immigrant community may be ineligible to vote on the grounds of citizenship. On this reasoning, one might expect that levels of immigration will be inversely related to turnout across Canadian constituencies. However, there is some evidence suggesting that immigrant communities, particularly in the urban ridings of southern Ontario, have recently undergone a relatively intensive process of politicization. This was perhaps most evident in the often-heated nomination races, for the Liberal party in particular, leading up to the 1988 federal election. If this was a watershed election in terms of the political mobilization of Canada's immigrant communities, as some have suggested (Stasiulis and Abu-Laban 1990, 584), the inverse relationship hypothesized above between the presence of immigrants and the level of turnout ought at least to diminish in the 1988 election (as compared with earlier elections).

The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of constituencies provide the raw material for political mobilization. The activities of politicians and parties may distort the basic relationships, however (Patterson and Caldeira 1983, 676–77). The "political mobilization model" assesses the extent to which the nature and intensity of political competition in different ridings affect the propensity of potential electors to vote. The underlying expectation is that a hotly contested and competitive local race will draw people to the polls on election day through several related processes. Similarly, turnout should be higher in ridings where contenders put forth a great deal of campaign effort.

Three indicators of the political context are employed in the analysis that follows. The percentage margin of victory in a riding is a relatively unambiguous measure of the closeness of the local race, and it is widely used (see Denver and Hands 1985; Eagles and Erfle 1989; Mughan 1986). When an election yields a small margin for the victor, it seems safe to infer that the closeness of the race was perceptible to incumbents, challengers and voters alike (though perhaps not in equal measure). In such circumstances, maximal campaigning effort should be forthcoming to mobilize support, and a relatively high level of voter interest should attend these efforts. Moreover, from the rational voter perspective, information costs associated with casting a reasoned ballot are diminished when parties and candidates work hard to put their message across. In addition, the probability that any individual's vote will determine the local outcome is increased when the race is close. Thus, both of these factors should enhance turnout levels (i.e., significant negative coefficients are expected for marginality measures, signalling that the larger the margin of victory, the lower the turnout).

It should be noted that similar arguments could be advanced concerning the impact on turnout of patterns of party competitiveness at the national level. Important as these national influences may be in determining the overall rate of participation in an election, the politicizing consequences should be felt more or less equally by all constituency electorates. As such, the impact of this potentially important set of factors will not be identifiable in this analysis, which focuses on interconstituency variations in turnout.

In addition, successful (i.e., serious) candidatures from minor parties or independent candidates should also increase the voter's interest in the local race. When such candidates contest a seat, they increase the pool of resources, both human and financial, available to mobilize the electorate. Since many minor party and independent candidates make little more than a token effort to attract votes, the proportion of all votes going to parties/candidates other than the Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats is used to indirectly represent the seriousness of their efforts and the success of their mobilization efforts.

A further measure of the amount of effort put forth by candidates and parties is found in the total amount of campaign-related expenditure in a constituency at election time. While some of this expenditure may be self-cancelling in partisan terms, every dollar spent in the local campaign will tend to increase the visibility and salience of the election for constituency electorates. Clearly, in an age of mass media and leader-dominated campaigns, national-level campaign expenditures (by parties and interest groups alike) will also have an important impact in politicizing the electorate. As with the closeness of the national race, however, the impact on turnout of such centralized expenditures will be felt across the board in Canadian constituencies (though some targeting of these funds on close or important races is to be expected). These funds will therefore be of limited utility in accounting for constituency variations in turnout.

The "political mobilization model" is therefore primarily concerned with the impact of local campaign expenditures on voter turnout.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that each dollar spent in a local race will have the same impact in terms of mobilizing voters. In the analysis that follows, this variable (measured in current dollars) has been logarithmically transformed to reflect the diminishing returns from spending beyond a certain threshold (Patterson and Caldeira 1983, 680).

RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE TESTS

Tables 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6 present tests of the socio-economic and political mobilization models of turnout, separately and in combination, for each of the last three federal elections (for descriptive statistics and correlation matrices for all variables, see appendix, tables 1.A1 and 1.A2, respectively). Care must be taken to avoid the well-known ecological fallacy when interpreting the results of these empirical investigations. It is prudent to bear in mind that the group-level relationships reported may not accurately represent individual-level relationships, and to remember that patterns in the constituency-level correlates of voting and nonvoting are of central concern.

Similarly, while it is interesting to compare the independent explanatory power of socio-economic and political mobilization models by estimating them separately for each election, care must be taken when interpreting the regression coefficients for these partial models. Specification bias arises when estimating incompletely specified models, and the coefficients from these models are best regarded as suggestive. The most reliable parameter estimates are therefore to be found in the results of the "full models" for each election (for a general discussion, see Gujarati 1988, 178–82).

Given the pervasive quality of regional divisions in Canadian politics, and in light of the previously noted provincial variations in turnout, it is important to control for these factors when estimating the impact of the two models of turnout. Accordingly, included in all models have been dummy variables for Newfoundland – traditionally the province with lowest turnout, see table 1.1 (ii) – the Maritimes, Quebec and the North/West. Ontario is not represented with a dummy variable to avoid overdetermining the models. Instead, the province serves as a baseline against which the distinctiveness of the other provinces/regional groupings can be compared. Ontario contains over one-third of all constituencies and traditionally exhibits turnout levels that are broadly comparable to the national norm; see again table 1.1 (i) and (ii). Statistically significant coefficients for the dummy variables should be interpreted as measuring the difference in turnout between the region concerned and that of Ontario, once the effects of the other measured variables in the equation have been taken into account.[6]

Table 1.4
Ecological models of voter turnout, 1980: unstandardized regression coefficient
(*t*-statistic)*

	Socio-economic model (4–1)	Political mobilization model (4–2)	Full model (4–3)
Constant	64.853	67.241	46.023
	(33.863)	(5.316)	(10.794)
Region or province			
Newfoundland	-8.379	-10.577	-7.063
	(-4.755)	(-5.577)	(-4.157)
Maritimes	0.941	1.746	1.633
	(0.888)	(1.622)	(1.605)
Quebec	-0.672	2.256	4.00
	(-0.775)	(1.748)	(3.325)
North/West	-2.591	-2.674	-1.974
	(-3.471)	(-3.575)	(-2.735)
Socio-economic			
% Low-income families	-0.358	—	-0.317
	(-5.004)		(-4.63)
% University degrees	-0.018	—	-0.079
	(-0.164)		(-0.762)
% Median length of occupancy (years)	1.396	—	1.236
	(7.417)		(6.769)
% Primary sector employment	0.104	—	0.134
	(2.354)		(3.147)
% Managers and administrators	0.215	—	0.282
	(1.4)		(1.912)
% Non-citizens	0.223	—	0.275
	(2.57)		(3.30)
Political mobilization			
% Margin of victory	—	-0.110	-0.066
		(-4.582)	(-3.227)
Log ($ campaign exp.)	—	0.523	1.764
		(0.463)	(1.85)
% Minor party support	—	-0.128	-0.133
		(-2.754)	(-2.917)
Adjusted R^2	0.472	0.285	0.523
F	26.101	16.977	24.688
Significance of *F*	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

*Normally, a *t*-statistic of greater than 1.65 indicates that the associated coefficient is significant at the .05 level for a one-tailed test. Those above 1.96 are significant at the .05 level for two-tailed tests.

Table 1.5
Ecological models of voter turnout, 1984: unstandardized regression coefficient
(*t*-statistic)*

	Socio-economic model (5–1)	Political mobilization model (5–2)	Full model (5–3)
Constant	71.55 (39.472)	47.598 (2.799)	52.736 (3.549)
Region or province			
Newfoundland	-5.79 (-3.472)	-9.874 (-5.847)	-5.707 (-3.671)
Maritimes	2.867 (2.858)	2.561 (2.606)	3.173 (3.384)
Quebec	3.448 (4.203)	2.38 (3.057)	4.46 (5.473)
North/West	-0.344 (-0.486)	-0.512 (-0.761)	0.075 (0.114)
Socio-economic			
% Low-income families	-0.336 (-4.972)	—	-0.328 (-5.059)
% University degrees	0.236 (2.29)	—	0.148 (1.54)
% Median length of occupancy (years)	0.969 (5.441)	—	0.796 (4.786)
% Primary sector employment	0.021 (0.511)	—	0.082 (2.089)
% Managers and administrators	0.107 (0.737)	—	0.27 (1.967)
% Non-citizens	0.117 (1.422)	—	0.140 (1.849)
Political mobilization			
% Margin of victory	—	-0.049 (-2.708)	-0.078 (-4.814)
Log ($ campaign exp.)	—	2.615 (1.771)	1.782 (1.403)
% Minor party support	—	-0.271 (-3.942)	-0.222 (-3.641)
Adjusted R^2	0.366	0.237	0.462
F	17.212	13.437	19.541
Significance of *F*	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

*Normally, a *t*-statistic of greater than 1.65 indicates that the associated coefficient is significant at the .05 level for a one-tailed test. Those above 1.96 are significant at the .05 level for two-tailed tests.

Table 1.6
Ecological models of voter turnout, 1988: unstandardized regression coefficient
(*t*-statistic)*

	Socio-economic model (6–1)	Socio-economic model (6–1a)	Political mobilization model (6–2)	Full model (6–3)	Full model (6–3a)
Constant	80.306 (43.726)	80.848 (45.416)	73.29 (4.97)	73.194 (5.96)	79.482 (6.701)
Region or province					
Newfoundland	–4.797 (-3.259)	–4.457 (-3.127)	–6.055 (-3.91)	–4.633 (-3.171)	–4.268 (-3.037)
Maritimes	3.051 (3.505)	3.054 (3.627)	2.575 (2.82)	3.104 (3.509)	3.06 (3.602)
Quebec	2.163 (2.802)	2.306 (3.086)	0.871 (1.32)	2.728 (3.436)	2.923 (3.829)
North/West	3.993 (6.93)	4.508 (8.04)	2.547 (3.95)	4.547 (7.41)	5.292 (8.81)
Socio-economic					
% Low-income families	–0.184 (-3.847)	–0.221 (–4.707)	—	–0.192 (–4.012)	–0.237 (-5.074)
% Degrees	0.348 (4.410)	0.340 (4.451)	—	0.345 (4.402)	0.338 (4.49)
% Movers	–0.217 (-5.839)	–0.192 (-5.292)	—	–0.227 (-5.917)	–0.190 (-5.066)
% Primary sector	0.022 (0.588)	0.016 (0.442)	—	0.018 (0.479)	0.017 (0.463)
% Managers and administrators	0.179 (1.474)	0.127 (1.081)	—	0.178 (1.48)	0.116 (0.994)
% Aboriginal peoples	—	–0.143 (–4.545)	—	—	–0.158 (–4.972)
% Immigrants	0.029 (1.222)	0.016 (0.688)	—	0.027 (1.117)	0.012 (0.518)
Political mobilization					
% Margin of victory	—	—	–0.021 (-1.04)	–0.032 (-1.931)	–0.035 (-2.21)
Log ($ campaign exp.)	—	—	0.137 (0.108)	0.705 (0.672)	0.202 (0.200)
% Minor party vote	—	—	–0.056 (-1.17)	–0.041 (-1.04)	–0.079 (-2.029)

Table 1.6 (cont'd)
Ecological models of voter turnout, 1988: unstandardized regression coefficient (*t*-statistic)*

	Socio-economic model (6–1)	Socio-economic model (6–1a)	Political mobilization model (6–2)	Full model (6–3)	Full model (6–3a)
Adjusted R^2	0.411	0.450	0.111	0.421	0.466
F	21.551	22.826	6.266	17.449	19.336
P	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

*Normally, a *t*-statistic of greater than 1.65 indicates that the associated coefficient is significant at the .05 level for a one-tailed test. Those above 1.96 are significant at the .05 level for two-tailed tests.

A quick glance at the empirical results indicates that sizable geographic variations persist even when both models of turnout are combined (i.e., equations 4-3, 5-3, 6-3 and 6-3a). Only two of the sixteen regional dummy variable coefficients reported for the full (combined) models in the three elections failed to achieve an acceptable level of statistical significance. While the residual regional distinctiveness in turnout is normally between 1 and 3 percent on either side of the Ontario norm, occasionally the difference is greater. In the case of Newfoundland, for example, turnout levels were consistently at least 4 percent lower than in Ontario, even after the effects of other variables were controlled. Clearly, the models developed to account for constituency variations in turnout still leave intact a considerable residuum of regional distinctiveness in turnout patterns.

Turning to the evidence bearing on the two models of voter turnout, clearly socio-economic variables have a stronger effect on the level of voting in constituencies than do the measures of political mobilization. For each election, the socio-economic model alone (equations 4-1, 5-1, 6-1 and 6-1a) explained a higher proportion of the variance in turnout levels than did the political mobilization model (equations 4-2, 5-2 and 6-2). In the analysis of the 1980 election, for example, almost half (47.2 percent) of the variance in turnout could be explained by the regional dummy variables and the socio-economic models.

Looking more closely at the components of the socio-economic model, most of the theoretically derived expectations regarding the sign and significance of coefficients were met. As expected, turnout was inversely related to the proportion of low-income families in a riding. This relationship was statistically significant for each of the three elections in both the socio-economic and the full models. In general, the coefficients for the low-income variable suggest that the constituency turnouts fell by between approximately one-fifth and one-third of a percentage point for each additional percent of low income families in a riding.

The evidence bearing on the other measures of constituency affluence and socio-economic status is less clear cut. Education has emerged as a strong determinant of voting turnout in other research (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 34–36). In the present analysis, however, the proportion of the electorate holding university degrees emerged as a strong and significant predictor of turnout only in the socio-economic model for 1984 (equation 5-1) and in the 1988 election. In the latter contest, *ceteris paribus*, each additional percent of residents holding degrees added about one-third of a percentage point to the level of turnout across constituencies. These somewhat uneven results complement the complex relationship between education and turnout reported in Mishler's survey-based study (Mishler 1979, 97). The 1984 results also parallel the findings of Patterson and Caldeira's aggregate analysis of turnout at American gubernatorial races (1983, 683–85). These authors uncovered substantial effects for education in their version of the socio-economic model but found that these effects disappeared once political controls were added.

Similarly mixed results attended the occupational status variable (proportion of managers and administrators in the labour force). Although all coefficients reported for this variable had the expected positive sign, only those estimated in the full models for 1980 and 1984 (equations 4-3 and 5-3) reached an acceptable threshold of statistical significance (i.e., a *t*-statistic of greater than 1.65).

While rural environments do seem to have been marginally more conducive than urban ones to higher turnout levels in the 1980 and 1984 elections, the "primary sector" variable failed to achieve statistical significance in any of the four equations containing it in 1988. However, despite their statistical significance in the analyses of the first two elections, the magnitude of these coefficients is relatively small (always less than one-tenth of a percent), suggesting that rural status itself is not a particularly consequential determinant of turnout levels once other influences have been controlled (for parallel results, see Mishler 1979, 105–106; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 30–34).

On the other hand, the residential stability of a riding's population was consistently one of the strongest socio-economic determinants of voter turnout levels (for convincing individual-level evidence of this from the United States, see Squire et al. 1987). Ridings disproportionately made up of mobile residents (whether measured in terms of median length of occupancy, as in tables 1.4 and 1.5, or in terms of the proportion of residents who have moved within the past five years, as in table 1.6) showed lower turnout levels. These coefficients are reasonably large. To illustrate, from the parameters estimates of the full model in 1988, it appears that with every 5 percent increase in the proportion of movers, turnout levels dropped by about one percent, after other factors have been controlled. The expectations for this factor based on the socio-economic model are thus strongly upheld.

The final component of the socio-economic model concerns the proportion of Aboriginal people and immigrants in ridings. Regarding the former, unfortunately the 1981 census did not report a count of native citizens in each constituency, and therefore it is impossible to explore the impact of this factor in the 1980 and 1984 elections. However, this measure was included in the 1986 census, and consequently the variable was included in the analysis of the 1988 election. To maintain comparability with the analysis of earlier elections, table 1.6 presents the estimates for the socio-economic and full models both with and without the Aboriginal peoples variable.

As expected, the zero-order correlation between the proportion of Aboriginal people in a riding and turnout is negative (–.17; see appendix, table 1.A2). Controlling for other socio-economic measures (equation 6-1a), turnout remains lower as the proportion of Aboriginal people in a constituency increases. The highly significant negative relationship is also found in the full model (equation 6-3a). Clearly, other things being equal, the more numerous Canada's native people are in a riding, the lower the level of turnout.

Estimating the effect on turnout levels of the presence of immigrants among riding populations is complicated by the need to use two different measures over the three elections. For the first two elections, the proportion of non-citizens was taken as a surrogate measure of the size of the immigrant population. Obviously, however, many immigrants will become Canadian citizens over time, and hence this is at best a rough indicator of the immigrant composition of ridings. By the same token, the measure of the presence of immigrants used in the analysis of the 1988 election is also imperfect for present purposes, since it includes some residents who are ineligible for enumeration and voting (and hence are not included in the calculation of turnout figures).

Notwithstanding these important caveats, the results for these ethnocultural variables are interesting when seen in light of the hypotheses advanced earlier concerning the growing politicization of Canada's immigrant communities. Rather than declining with the level of immigrants and non-citizens, turnout levels seem to be positively related to the size of these minority groups. Contrary to expectations regarding the intensified politicization of ethnic communities in the 1988 campaign, this positive relationship is especially evident in the analysis of the first two elections of the 1980s. The failure of this factor to reach statistical significance in the 1988 contest may be in part at least an artefact of measurement. The measure of the size of immigrant communities used for that election was much more inclusive than that for the earlier two elections. What seems clear, however, is that the presence of immigrant communities has not diminished the level of voter turnout in constituencies over the last decade, net of other influences.

Political mobilization variables, taken with the regional dummies, were somewhat less successful in accounting for variations in turnout. These models explained between 11.0 and 28.5 percent of the variance in turnout. In general, the results are weaker and less easily interpretable than those generated by the socio-economic model. For example, the estimates from the political mobilization model for the 1988 election reveal that none of the three measures of political mobilization makes a statistically significant impact on the level of turnout (equation 6-2). In light of this, it is tempting to speculate that the impact of local campaign spending might have been nullified by the combined effects of the multi-million dollar campaigns of the national parties and the estimated $10 million advertising campaign mounted by proponents and opponents of free trade in that election (Gray 1989, 17). These outlays made the 1988 election by far the most expensive in Canadian history. Thus, while national-level campaign expenditures may not be able to explain interconstituency variations in turnout, they might well explain the lack of a significant local component in this relationship.

If local spending had no significant impact on the level of turnout in 1988, neither was it a particularly consequential determinant in the earlier two elections. The estimates for this coefficient from the 1980 political mobilization model, for example, also failed to reach the .05 level of significance (equation 4-2), and only just cleared this threshold in the analysis for 1984 (equation 5-2). Only in the combined model for 1980 (equation 4-3) does the factor make a statistically significant impact on the level of voting when all other influences are controlled. Somewhat surprisingly, therefore, local spending does not appear to be a particularly important determinant of the levels of constituency turnout.

Also contrary to expectations, the presence of minor party and independent candidates actually depressed turnout levels in Canadian constituencies (though only one of the three coefficients for this variable in the 1988 analyses reached the .05 level of significance). These findings clearly violate the expectations based on the political mobilization model, which suggested that the participation of a wide range of candidates and parties in a riding would contribute to the politicization of the local electorate. No completely satisfactory explanation for these counter-intuitive results is available. One might speculate, however, that the level of minor party support in a riding is symptomatic of a local sense of political alienation and estrangement from the established party system. If this is true, the relatively meagre support going to these parties (less than 5 percent of the vote on average; see the appendix) is perhaps best regarded as an indicator of a larger sense of frustration on the part of constituency electorates. This frustration, in turn, might also find expression in widespread abstention from the polls.

There was some supportive evidence for the political mobilization model to be found in the tables, however. The signs of the marginality coefficients were all in the expected direction (negative, signalling that turnout declines as the margin of victory increases). In sum, the performance of the political mobilization model was uneven and generally less impressive than the socio-economic model. Certainly, there is little evidence to corroborate the conclusion reached by Patterson and Caldeira (1983, 686) that "aggressive and intensive campaigning can impressively mobilize voters." Minor party and independent candidatures seem to have little impact on the level of intensity of campaigning, perhaps suggesting that these political phenomena tend to absorb disaffected supporters of mainstream parties ("protest voters") rather than mobilizing previously uninvolved groups. With respect to the expenditure coefficients, it is tempting to speculate that the regulatory legislation limiting local campaign spending sets limits that are sufficiently low as to depress the impact of this factor on levels of turnout.

One other potential influence on turnout that, while not purely political, might be amenable to legislative modification, concerns the influence of early returns from eastern Canada affecting the voting calculus of voters in the West. This situation is possible because the Canadian electorate is dispersed over five-and-a-half time zones[7] and because the polls close on federal elections at 8:00 PM local time on election day. With the development of sophisticated computer forecasting routines, highly reliable and accurate predictions of the size and direction of victory margins have been generated shortly after the polls close in the easternmost time zones. While the *Canada Elections Act* prohibits the broadcasting of such results in other time zones prior to the local closing of the polls (Soderlund et al. 1984, 121–22), it is possible that premature announcements of a projected winner could be picked up in the West from American radio coverage or a cable/satellite television feed. In turn, it is possible that such announcements may adversely affect turnout levels in the localities concerned (see, for example, Hamel 1989, 16).

Table 1.1 (ii) lends some support to this argument, in that the average turnout levels for Alberta and British Columbia are lower than for most other provinces. However, while small parts of Saskatchewan are located in the Mountain Standard Time zone with Alberta, turnout in Saskatchewan is higher than the norm for Canadian provinces. Moreover, voter turnout at provincial elections has tended to be lower in British Columbia and Alberta than in other provinces for reasons that are obviously unattributable to the premature announcement of election results (Mishler 1979, 31; Wearing 1988, 76).

If doubt remains, further evidence on the question can be taken from the multivariate analyses presented in tables 1.4 to 1.6. The coefficients for the North/West dummy variable in the full models express the distinctiveness of ridings in this region (using Ontario as the baseline) after the effect of the other variables has been taken into account. Presuming that the time zone effect constitutes an important portion of the general distinctiveness of the North/West as a political context, the coefficients for the regional dummy variable for this region ought to be consistently negative. Here again, the evidence is uneven. As expected, the coefficient for the North/West dummy in 1980 is significant and negative, in line with this criticism. However, in the 1984 election the coefficients, two of which are negative, slip well below acceptable thresholds of statistical significance. Moreover, turnout was significantly higher in the North/West in the 1988 election. Therefore, it cannot be conclusively argued that the inadvertent reception of premature projections of electoral victories is likely to be a particularly important determinant of non-voting in Canada's West.

Clearly, the most intellectually and empirically satisfying explanations of constituency variations in voter turnout derive from the combined (full) models. Overall, judging from the reasonably large adjusted R^2 figures and the highly significant *F*-values for the four fully specified regression models estimated, it seems that patterns in voter turnout are relatively well explained by reference to socio-economic and political characteristics measured at the constituency level. However, it is interesting to note that variations in constituency turnout levels were more satisfactorily explained by the models in the low-turnout 1980 race than in the following two elections. This suggests that in low-turnout years (and perhaps to a lesser extent in maintaining elections generally), underlying relationships that normally explain the decision to vote are strengthened. In elections marked by widespread electoral change (as in 1984) or by the domination of a single issue (as with the free trade question in 1988), the decision of whether to vote may well be more affected by the extraordinary temper of the times. In this context, the decision to vote, like other aspects of electoral behaviour, appears to be less constrained by traditional relationships. Until further testing is undertaken, however, this must remain conjectural.

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing, it is clear that the probability of Canadians going to the polls on election day is responsive to a variety of factors. Many of these may usefully be conceptualized and measured using aggregate census and political data for Canadian constituencies. Generally speaking, the most important determinants of turnout are spatial (the regional dummy variables) and socio-economic (particularly residential stability and economic affluence). The effects of politicians, the strategic electoral context and political mobilization on the decision to vote, while detectable, are clearly of secondary importance. More speculatively, it appears that the power of these determinants varies in accordance with the larger political climate or environment (as with the 1980 contest or the Mulroney landslide in 1984). Exceptional times may suspend conventional relationships.

With some relatively large regional variations, Canadians go to the polls in reassuringly high proportions. There are no discernible long-term secular trends in turnout. Moreover, such differences as do exist across constituencies are relatively well explained by the socio-economic and, to a lesser extent, the political foundations of constituency politics. While there is little in the foregoing that should cause alarm, neither is there much to comfort the reformer wishing to strengthen the fabric of Canadian electoral democracy by engineering some increase in voter turnout. The challenges for those wishing to increase voter participation are unlikely to be amenable to any "quick fix." Instead, differential participation rates seem primarily to reflect both the underlying inequalities (both regional and socio-economic) and the geographic mobility characteristic of Canadian society. With all probability, while these qualities persist, so too will a measure of non-voting.

APPENDIX

Table 1.A1
Descriptive statistics: Political and census variables

	Mean %	Standard deviation
Political variables		
Turnout, 1980	69.4	5.6
Turnout, 1984	75.6	6.4
Turnout, 1988	75.3	4.2
Margin, 1980	25.1	5.6
Margin, 1984	20.9	15.8
Margin, 1988	16.6	13.9
Minor / indep. cand., 1980	3.5	6.8
Minor / indep. cand., 1984	3.1	4.2
Minor / indep. cand., 1988	4.6	5.6
Log (expenditure), 1980	11.3	0.2
Log (expenditure), 1984	10.8	0.4
Log (expenditure), 1988	11.6	0.2
Census variables (by year of census)		
Low-income families, 1981	13.5	5.1
Low-income families, 1986	17.0	6.3
University degrees, 1981	5.9	4.2
University degrees, 1986	7.2	4.8
Median length of occup., 1981	5.2 (yrs.)	1.8 (yrs.)
Moved in last 5 years, 1986	39.8	7.5
Primary sector, 1981	6.5	8.0
Primary sector, 1986	6.3	7.5
Managers / admin., 1981	8.3	3.1
Managers / admin., 1986	10.1	3.4
Non-citizens, 1986	3.8	3.9
Immigrants, 1986	14.5	12.1
Aboriginal peoples, 1986	2.0	6.3

Table 1.A2
Correlation matrices

(i) 1980 and 1984 elections, 1981 census variables

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Turnout, '80	1.00													
2. Turnout, '84	0.59	1.00												
3. Low-inc.	–0.35	–0.30	1.00											
4. Degrees	–0.02	0.15	–0.10	1.00										
5. Length res.	0.49	0.26	0.05	–0.33	1.00									
6. Primary	0.19	0.03	–0.05	–0.43	0.40	1.00								
7. Managers	0.09	0.24	–0.40	0.75	–0.31	–0.28	1.00							
8. Noncitiz.	–0.01	0.04	–0.06	–0.42	0.28	0.40	0.20	1.00						
9. Margin '80	–0.37	–0.12	0.34	–0.04	–0.18	–0.10	0.05	–0.13	1.00					
10. Margin '84	–0.19	–0.14	–0.26	–0.04	–0.06	0.18	0.10	–0.08	0.07	1.00				
11. Minor '80	0.25	–0.04	0.26	–0.11	0.06	–0.06	–0.08	–0.19	0.25	–0.04	1.00			
12. Minor '84	–0.24	–0.19	0.23	0.02	–0.18	0.07	0.10	–0.02	0.39	–0.03	0.28	1.00		
13. Lexp. '80	0.27	0.14	–0.23	0.14	0.07	–0.07	0.01	0.23	–0.75	–0.03	–0.20	–0.39	1.00	
14. Lexp. '84	0.20	0.14	–0.21	0.13	–0.10	–0.14	0.08	0.24	–0.44	–0.36	–0.22	–0.11	0.51	1.00

(ii) 1986 census, 1988 election variables

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Turnout	1.00										
2. Low-inc.	–0.29	1.00									
3. Degrees	0.29	–0.02	1.00								
4. Movers	–0.05	0.03	0.54	1.00							
5. Primary	0.08	0.01	–0.45	–0.47	1.00						
6. Managers	0.37	–0.37	0.76	0.43	–0.43	1.00					
7. Aboriginal	–0.17	–0.15	–0.15	0.10	0.09	–0.09	1.00				
8. Immigrant	0.05	–0.01	0.50	0.47	–0.43	0.33	–0.15	1.00			
9. Margin '88	–0.06	0.06	–0.15	–0.16	0.03	–0.03	–0.06	–0.26	1.00		
10. Minor '88	0.05	–0.03	0.02	0.25	0.20	0.01	0.05	0.04	0.10	1.00	
11. Lexp. '88	0.02	–0.12	0.18	0.35	–0.12	0.13	–0.03	0.22	–0.41	0.12	1.00

NOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Paul Cornish (SUNY at Buffalo) in helping prepare the data for this analysis, and of Elections Canada officials (in particular, John Enright) for efficiently making available a variety of the information analysed in this study. Many helpful suggestions on an earlier version were made by Peter Aucoin, Herman Bakvis, Pierre Lortie and two anonymous reviewers.

1. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *ecology* refers (among other things) to a branch of biology which deals "with the relations of living organisms to their surroundings, their habits, and modes of life, etc." The current analysis follows a relatively long tradition of electoral research in using aggregate data for constituencies to represent and analyse the sociopolitical environment within which individual political behaviour takes place. For useful discussions of the ecological approach, see Ranney (1962) and Ersson et al. (1982).

2. Canada does not maintain a permanent voters list. Instead, election officials undertake to compile a list of eligible voters between the 38th and 32nd day prior to election day (see Canada, *Canada Elections Act*, ss. 63, 64). While in principle this ought to produce a highly accurate voters list (more so, for example, than the British practice of annually updating a permanent list), complaints following the most recent election concerning the incomplete enumeration of some areas have become reasonably commonplace. Similarly, corrupt practices (the so-called "graveyard vote," for example) might also taint the reliability of aggregate election figures. Relatively little evidence bearing on the accuracy of official turnout figures is available, although Laponce's study (1967, 81) of a riding in Vancouver indicates that the discrepancy between "official" and "real" rates of voter turnout might be as high as 5 percent. Since there is no evidence to suggest that the spatial distribution of such inaccuracies will be patterned (Laponce's speculations regarding potential rural-urban differences in accuracy notwithstanding), the problem of measurement error will be overlooked in the analysis that follows.

3. In addition to the obvious gains in measurement accuracy involved in matching census and electoral data collected as close together in time as possible, extensive boundary changes enacted in July 1988 necessitate the employment of two census data sets in this analysis. This is because the results of the 1981 census were released on the old constituency boundaries (in use between 1974 and 1984), while the 1986 census is only available on the basis of the 1988 riding boundaries.

4. This terminology loosely follows the widely used classification of presidential elections (as maintaining, deviating and realigning) developed by Angus Campbell and his colleagues at Michigan (1960, chap. 19).

5. In other countries, the proportion employed in agriculture is normally taken as a reasonable surrogate for the rural-urban continuum. However, given

the sparsely populated and non-arable quality of much of rural Canada, such a simple measure was deemed inadequate and a summary measure of "primary sector employment" was created. The mining sector was not included in the calculation of this composite measure because it includes many oil refinery workers whose places of employment and residence tend to be concentrated in urban areas.

6. Regional dummy variables are scored "1" for each constituency located in the particular region, and "0" otherwise. They are frequently used in regression analyses to incorporate categorical variables (i.e., those not measured in uniform units) such as gender, religion or region (see Gujarati 1988, 431–37). Coefficients for dummy variables, in effect, provide an adjustment in the constant (or "intercept") that would be necessary to empirically represent the distinctiveness of constituencies in each region after other measured influences have been taken into account. For a clear discussion and application of dummy variables to the measurement of regionalism in Canadian voting patterns, see Blake (1972).
7. The time zones, from east to west, are Newfoundland Standard Time, UTC minus 3 hours, 30 minutes; Atlantic Standard Time, UTC minus 4 hours; Eastern Standard Time, UTC minus 5 hours; Central Standard Time, UTC minus 6 hours; Mountain Standard Time, UTC minus 7 hours; Pacific Standard Time, UTC minus 8 hours. When the polls close in Newfoundland at 8:00 PM, therefore, it is only 3:30 PM in British Columbia and Yukon.

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VOTING TURNOUT IN CANADA

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SINCE THE SECOND World War, it has been normal for three-quarters of the eligible voters to cast ballots in Canadian federal elections. The percentage voting in any given election has varied somewhat from the norm, but has done so within a fairly narrow range. The actual turnout rates in postwar elections are given in table 2.1.

In the 15 elections held in this country since 1945, substantial deviation from the turnout norm of 75 percent has been infrequent. Only twice, in 1953 and in the February election of 1980, has turnout dropped below 70 percent. At the other extreme, 79 percent of eligible voters went to the polls in the three elections of 1958, 1962 and 1963; it appears that Canadians' interest in electoral politics reached its apogee during the Diefenbaker years.

An average turnout rate of 75 percent could, however, be achieved in several ways, a problem not addressed in aggregate-level studies of turnout (Scarrow 1967). The crucial question here is whether the 25 percent (plus or minus a few points) of eligible Canadians who do not vote in each election is the *same* group of people each time. Survey evidence demonstrates clearly that such is not the case. Several of the national election studies (Clarke et al. 1991, xii) contain the question: "In the federal elections that have been held since you have been old enough to vote, have you voted in all of them, most of them, some of them, or none of them?" The answers given in the 1979 study are typical: all of them, 66%; most of them, 23%; some of them, 9%; none of them, 2%.

To pursue this question a little further, the 1974–79–80 National Election Panel Study allows the same respondents to be tracked over the five elections from 1968 to 1980 (Clarke et al. 1991). They were asked to recall whether they had voted in 1968 and 1972, and then interviewed about their voting on three separate occasions: after the elections of

Table 2.1
Turnout rates in Canadian federal elections

Election year	% voting
1945	75
1949	74
1953	68
1957	74
1958	79
1962	79
1963	79
1965	75
1968	76
1972	77
1974	71
1979	76
1980	69
1984	76
1988	75

1974, 1979 and 1980. Of those respondents in the panel who were eligible to have voted in all five elections 74% report doing so, 18% in four, 5% in three, and only 2% in one or two. None of these respondents failed to vote in at least one election.

Survey research tends to overestimate turnout, for two reasons. The first is that those people who are uninterested in politics and elections are both less likely to vote and less inclined to participate in surveys. The second is that some survey respondents will untruthfully report voting, either out of embarrassment at not having done so or out of a desire to please the interviewer. It is generally agreed, therefore, that there is a small hard core of perennial non-voters, numbering perhaps 5 percent of the population at most. Much more common are occasional voters who participate some but not all of the time.

REASONS FOR NON-VOTING

Since most non-voting in Canada is intermittent, researchers have been inclined to attribute it to the particular circumstances of individual elections. Election campaigns are held at different times of year, with those in winter or summer often achieving lower turnout rates because of weather conditions or the concentration of the holiday plans of the public. The low-turnout elections of 1953 and 1974 were held in summer, and that of 1980 in winter. The public may be more or less interested in the personalities or issues being offered by the parties in any given election, and interest in voting may rise or flag accordingly. Election situations perceived as competitive or one-sided, either on a national or a constituency basis, may affect decisions to vote or abstain. Campaigns may be exciting or dull, with the same effects (Frizzell et al. 1989; Penniman 1988; Clarke et al. 1979).

That voting turnout is to some extent structured by sociodemographic position and political attitudes has been a finding of long standing in the literature on political participation (Verba et al. 1978). Interest in politics, political efficacy (the feeling that one can potentially influence the political process) and the amount of political information possessed by individuals, affect the propensity to vote frequently. The effect of these variables on voting turnout is, however, much lower than on higher-level forms of political participation, such as campaigning (Mishler 1979, chap. 4). Similarly, social structural variables like social class, occupation and education have been found to relate only weakly to voting turnout, but more strongly to other forms of participation (ibid., chap. 5). Age is also related to turnout, with younger voters participating at lower levels in most political activities (Pammett and Myles 1991).

The final factor affecting voting turnout is "administrative disenfranchisement." This term does not refer to those groups specifically barred from voting through the legal definition of the franchise, such as on grounds of age or place of residence (Ward 1963; Qualter 1970). Rather, it refers to the way in which some electoral procedures inhibit voting by presenting difficulties to participation that, although not technically insurmountable, require extra effort. Those who are seriously ill or out of the country, for example, may vote by appointing a proxy, but the procedure for doing so is cumbersome and time-consuming. Advance polls exist that allow voting at different times for those who will be away from home on election day; but again, this procedure requires extra knowledge and effort. In a study of the 1963 federal election in a Vancouver constituency, Laponce identified a group of nonvoters who were away from the constituency on election day or who were not well, categories we would call "administrative disenfranchisement" (Laponce 1967).

In 1986, Elections Canada commissioned the Gallup organization to include a series of questions in one of their omnibus surveys to attempt to determine the reasons for non-voting (Gallup 1986). Elections Canada was particularly concerned with reasons that might have resulted from the official methods of conducting the balloting or from procedures that might be amended within the terms of the *Canada Elections Act*. In the Elections Canada survey, the magnitude of the various problems was measured by asking those who had not voted in the previous election to pick their reasons from a series of statements designed to capture the various possibilities for non-voting. Since the study was carried out two years after the 1984 election, a substantial group of people who reported not voting in that election did not do so because they were not eligible, having come of voting age or acquired citizenship in the intervening two years. These people are not included in further calculations.

For the remaining non-voters, the most heavily chosen single reason (chosen by 22 percent) was: "I was unable to vote either on election day, in the advance polls, in the Elections Canada office (office of the Returning Officer) or to vote by proxy." When queried further about what happened, those choosing this category mainly said they were away (out of the country or away from home) or were sick. An additional 4 percent found that their names had been left off the voters list. The rest of the alternatives gave respondents the opportunity to say that their reasons for non-voting involved their dislike for the candidates, parties and leaders, as well as to admit that "I was just lazy; I didn't feel like taking the trouble to go and vote." The close-ended format of this question produces a smaller estimate for the amount of administrative disenfranchisement (26 percent of potentially eligible non-voters) than is found when open-ended measures are used.

Three of the national election studies (1974, 1980 and 1984) included a question that asked those who reported not voting in the election what their reasons were. In all three studies, these questions were open-ended, and responses were recorded verbatim. It is useful to look in detail at the answers given. Table 2.2 arrays these for each election year.

The reasons for non-voting show considerable consistency from one election to the next. Topping the lists are those who were simply away from home on election day, whether on business or vacation. Those people who did not vote because of absence either did not know about the provisions for advance polling or proxy voting, were not able to utilize them, did not care to spend the time that they would entail, or were called away at the last minute. Some of the people not voting because they were away from home were students resident at universities in other locations; student voting problems are well known.

Table 2.2
Reasons for non-voting

	Number of respondents		
	1974	1980	1984
Busy	44	4	63
Can't remember	4	1	—
Couldn't decide, didn't know candidates	24	11	27
Didn't like the candidates	—	5	—
Didn't want to	12	15	—
Don't know	25	—	10
Forgot, didn't know where it was	7	2	9
In hospital, sick	55	24	45
Miscellaneous reasons	—	—	13
My party would win without my vote	—	2	—
My vote wouldn't make any difference	31	7	—
Never vote	6	1	—
No particular reason	—	6	37
Not eligible, landed immigrant	—	5	—
Not enumerated	9	11	53
Not interested, didn't bother	53	23	129
On vacation	76	25	—
Out of town	71	11	109
Out of town on business, at school	20	34	—
Protest	9	—	—
Refused	2	—	5
Religious reasons	2	1	11

A second group of non-voters were too ill to make it to the polls, either because they were confined at home or in hospital. Again, it would have been possible for many who were ill to have made other arrangements, to appoint a proxy, for example. This, however, is a reasonably difficult and time-consuming process and probably not high on the priority list of those who are very sick. Elections Canada does establish polls in some hospitals, but only those patients who are enumerated in the hospital in the period before the election and are still there on election day are eligible to vote there.

In a third group, non-voters responded that they were too busy. Without further information, it is difficult to know whether this is simply a rationalization for disinterest, or whether administrative changes, such as the opportunity to mail in a vote, might have captured them.

A fourth group of non-voters can be generally classified as uninterested. These are people who state that they just didn't bother to vote, forgot about it, couldn't find the polling place, couldn't decide whom to vote for, didn't like any of the people or parties who were running, or felt that their vote wouldn't make any difference in the outcome. Capturing many of these potential votes through administrative changes might be difficult.

Finally, a group of non-voters were prevented from voting because they had been left off the voters list and not added during the time available for revisions of the list. The geographical distribution of the unenumerated people in the 1984 sample was examined to determine their constituencies, although the sampling method used in this survey does not identify their specific polls. More than one-half of the total were located in totally urban constituencies and another quarter inhabited ridings that were predominantly urban. It is logical that the bulk of those not voting because of non-enumeration lived in urban areas, since the electoral rules provide that rural voters left off the list may be added on the spot on election day if they are "vouched for."

One other category of non-voter represented in table 2.2 consists of those who did not vote for "religious reasons." A closer examination of the religion professed by these people indicates that two-thirds of them are Jehovah's Witnesses.

After examination, the reasons for non-voting in Canadian federal elections fall into five categories: those who were "away" from home on the election date; those who were too "sick" to get to the polls; those who were too "busy" to find the time; those who were "not interested" enough to vote; and those who were ineligible due to "non-enumeration." The distribution of responses in the five categories in the three elections under study is summarized in table 2.3.

The reasons presented in table 2.3 should not be scrutinized too closely for trends over time in variation among the categories. Coding differences could well have placed some people in the "busy" category in 1984 who were classified as "away" in 1974 and 1980, for example. Similarly, the substantially larger group of respondents who claimed not to have been enumerated in 1984 may be a result of sampling differences between the studies.

Table 2.3
Type of reason for non-voting
(percentages)

	1974	1980	1984
Away	38	39	23
Sick	13	13	9
Busy	10	2	19
Uninterested	37	40	39
Unenumerated	2	6	11
N	*(437)*	*(182)*	*(483)*

The general lesson to be drawn from these self-expressed reasons for non-voting is that a substantial portion of those who do not participate in any given election are away, sick, busy or unenumerated and might be encouraged to vote if the administrative arrangements were in place to allow them to do so without the extra effort that is now required. I will return to this theme in the final sections of this study. First, however, we will examine the socio-demographic and attitudinal correlates of non-voting.

DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF TURNOUT

A number of the basic demographic characteristics of the population have relationships to the likelihood of voting. To investigate these in detail, a merged dataset was created from 10 Gallup polls taken in the months from October 1984 to October 1985. Combining these polls gave a sample size of over 10 000 respondents, each of whom was asked whether he or she had voted (if eligible) in the previous federal election held in September of 1984. The total percentage in the combined polls that reported not voting in 1984 was 19 percent, a figure that more closely approximates the actual rate of non-voting than those found in the national election studies.

This analysis using pooled Gallup data, although extremely accurate statistically (because of the large sample size), is limited because of the small number of "predictor" variables included in the polls. Table 2.4 reports the basic relationships between turnout and age, family income, marital status, occupation and religion. Turnout figures for the variables of sex, education, union membership and community size are reported in the appendix (table 2.A1). They are not included here because the relationships are so slight as to be substantively insignificant.

The most substantial relationship with voting turnout comes with age, where young voters (18–21 years old) are three times less likely to vote than those aged 50 or more. Table 2.4 shows that 37 percent of this youngest group did not vote in 1984 as opposed to 12 percent of the

Table 2.4
Demographic correlates of voting in 1984, pooled Gallup polls

	Voted (%)	Did not vote (%)	*N*
Age			
18–21	63	37	874
22–29	71	29	2 197
30–39	83	17	2 310
40–49	85	15	1 361
50–59	88	12	1 336
60 and +	88	12	1 963
V = .21			
Family income (thousands)			
Under 10	74	26	1 208
10–15	77	23	975
15–20	79	21	864
20–30	81	19	1 810
30–40	82	18	1 530
40 and +	86	14	2 054
V = .09			
Marital status			
Single	70	30	2 011
Widowed, separated, divorced	77	23	1 590
Married	84	16	6 609
V = .14			
Occupation			
Student	68	32	572
Unemployed	70	30	401
Blue-collar	77	23	2 357
Clerical, sales	81	19	1 382
Housewives	82	18	2 369
Professional, business	85	15	1 905
V = .12			
Religion			
Other	71	29	237
None	72	28	1 212
Jewish	78	22	90
Roman Catholic	82	18	4 556
Protestant	82	18	4 123
V = .09			

older groups. Voting is also lower than average among those in the next youngest group – 29 percent of those aged 22–29 did not vote in 1984. Once citizens have turned 30, their likelihood of voting is higher.

Table 2.4 shows a number of other variables that correlate with lower voting rates. Those who are of single, as opposed to married, status are less likely to vote. Those who were formerly married (widowed, separated or divorced) form an intermediate category more likely to vote than single citizens but less likely than those who are married. Voting rates are lower among students and among those who are unemployed. Relationships between voting turnout and other occupational categories are weaker, but blue-collar workers are less likely to vote than those in the professional-managerial-business world. There is also a relationship with income. Finally, those who profess no religion or who belong to religions outside the main Protestant or Catholic denominations are less likely to vote.

A number of these variables are associated with each other. A profile of non-voters would show them more likely to be "young," "single," "lower income," "students or unemployed," "with no or an unconventional religion." People with this profile are at least twice as likely not to vote as those with other combinations of these social characteristics.

Age has the most substantial relationship in the group of variables studied here, and statistical controls for age have major effects on the other relationships presented in table 2.4. For example, the control for age substantially washes out the relationship with occupation, since it is the young students, the young unemployed, and the young blue-collar workers who are less likely to vote. The unemployed in the 50-and-over age groups, however, are also less likely to vote than the employed of those ages. The relationship of non-voting with single marital status is washed out by a control for age in those less than 30 years old or those in their forties, but sustained for those in their thirties or fifties. Younger voters with only public-school education are particularly low in turnout.

A control for province or region of Canada has some effects on the basic relationships shown in table 2.4. Voting among the youngest age group (18–21) is particularly low in British Columbia, where only 46 percent voted in 1984. Young, single voters look most like their older counterparts in eastern Canada, where few age differences are apparent in the data. The tendency for blue-collar workers to participate less is not present in Quebec, Manitoba or Saskatchewan. Jews in Quebec were less likely to vote in 1984, but this was not true anywhere else.

A pair of multivariate analyses was applied to the data under discussion. With the dependent variable "voted/did not vote" in 1984, a multiple regression was run using the categories of age, religion, income, occupation, education and marital status as predictor variables. The results of that regression analysis are presented in the appendix, table 2.A3. The first variables to emerge are the two youngest age categories, which together explain about 4 percent of the variance in vote/non-vote. The addition of all remaining predictor variables raises the variance explained to 6 percent. As a check on the accuracy of the regression procedure, a logit analysis was also conducted using the same variables. (Logit is a technique that, some statisticians argue, is preferable when a dichotomous dependent variable is being used. But it has the disadvantage that its results are not readily interpretable in terms of variance explained.) The results were very similar, with the two youngest age categories having the largest coefficients followed by the under $10 000 income category, as found in the regression analysis (table 2.A3).

This analysis has demonstrated that there are demographic correlates of voting turnout in Canada, the strongest being age. However, none of these relationships is strong in any absolute sense. Most young people do vote (63 percent of those aged 18–21 and 71 percent of those 22–29 years old in 1984). The correlations in table 2.4 ranged between .09 and .21, modest even by social science standards. The multivariate analysis explained only 6 percent of the variance in voting turnout using these demographic variables – not an impressive result.

Therefore, there are some demographic factors that inhibit voting in Canada. Younger people are less knowledgeable about the procedures and more likely to be absent from home. Many young people have not had the time, or seen the need, to develop a strong interest in politics. Single people have a less visible stake in many of the programs of government (or believe they do). But the effect of these demographic variables is not so strong as to provide insurmountable barriers to reform efforts.

ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CORRELATES OF NON-VOTING

In contrast to the Gallup polls utilized in the previous section, the national election studies contain a variety of measures of public attitudes that relate to whether people vote or not. These attitudinal correlates measure interest in politics, satisfaction with the material side of life and political efficacy (the feeling that one can understand and influence the political process). Several behavioural variables in the form of types of political participation or action are also present. Since the relationships of the attitudinal variables with voting are very similar from one study to the next, table 2.5 presents the correlations for three selected years, 1974, 1980 and 1984, which are representative of

Table 2.5
Attitudinal and behavioural correlates of non-voting in three elections

	1974	1980	1984
Attitudes			
How interested in the election	.31	.31	.28
How much attention paid to politics generally	.15	.16	.22
How satisfied with material standard of living	.11	.04	.06
I don't think the government cares much what people like me think.	.06	.13	.16
Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	.05	.07	.19
People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	.04	.08	.13
So many other people vote in federal elections that it doesn't matter very much whether I vote or not.	.22	.14	.17
Behaviour			
How often read about politics in newspaper	.15	.20	.18
Watch political programs on television	n/a*	n/a*	.15
How often discuss politics with other people	.15	.19	.17
How often try to convince friends to vote the same as you	.12	.13	.14
How often attend political meeting or rally	.12	.11	.15
How often contact public officials / politicians	.09	.16	.14
How often work for a political party / candidate	.10	.15	.15
How often contribute money to party / candidate	n/a*	.11	.18

Notes: Correlations in table are Cramer's *V*. All are statistically significant at .05.

*Not asked.

all elections in the past two decades. I have not included the 1988 study in the table since many of the attitudinal and behavioural variables that relate to turnout were not included in this survey.

The decision to vote or abstain from voting relates to all of the variables listed in table 2.5 which measure political interest, participation and efficacy. It is not surprising that the strongest correlation is with interest in the particular election concerned, since, as we have seen, lack of interest in the election is one of the major reasons given for nonvoting (table 2.2). Although the correlation is of a lower order of magnitude, those less interested in politics generally ("from day to day, when there is not a big election campaign going on") are also less likely to cast a ballot.

Feelings of low political efficacy are also associated with decisions not to vote in any given election. People who agree with statements that politics is too complicated to understand, that government doesn't care what people like them think, and that they don't have any say in what the government does, are less likely to be motivated to participate. The strongest attitudinal correlate in this set is with the statement that "so many other people vote in elections that it doesn't matter very much whether I vote or not." Since this variable is indicative of a particularly interesting public attitude, it will be examined more closely later on.

Voting, of course, is a form of political participation. It is therefore to be expected that it will correlate with other types of political action such as campaigning, discussing politics with friends, attending meetings, etc. The strongest relationship, however, is with reading about the campaign, or politics generally, in the newspaper. This variable will be studied in more detail.

The belief that so many other voters participate in elections that one's vote is unimportant is held by a minority of Canadians. Almost two-thirds of the sample strongly disagreed with the idea in 1984; only 8 percent strongly agreed with it, and another 11 percent agreed "somewhat." The relationship of this belief with voting is shown in detail in table 2.6 for the surveys of 1974 and 1984, two studies in which the number of non-voters was large enough for detailed analysis.

Table 2.6 shows that the decade between 1974 and 1984 has seen a shift of opinion on this attitude. There is little difference in the propensity of voters at the two time points to agree with it, and in fact voters in 1984 are more likely to strongly disagree with the statement than their counterparts 10 years earlier. Non-voters, however, were considerably more likely to feel in 1984 that the statement was correct; close to half of 1984 non-voters indicated that they believed their participation to be unimportant.

We noted earlier that non-voters may be categorized into five different types: those who did not vote because they were away, sick,

Table 2.6
Attitude that there are so many voters that the individual's vote doesn't matter, by 1974 and 1984 behaviour
(percentages)

	1974		1984	
So many voters	Voted	Did not	Voted	Did not
Strongly agree	4	9	6	20
Agree somewhat	8	19	9	23
Disagree somewhat	47	53	16	21
Strongly disagree	41	19	69	36
N	*(968)*	*(216)*	*(2 791)*	*(472)*
V	.22		.27	

busy, uninterested or unenumerated (table 2.3). There is some variation between these categories depending on which reason for non-voting we consider. Table 2.7 presents these data.

The proportion in most categories of non-voters who agreed that there were so many other voters who participated that it didn't matter whether they voted has generally increased between 1974 and 1984 (table 2.7). This increase is perhaps most noticeable among the uninterested, 30 percent of whom strongly agreed with that statement in 1984. Those who were unable to vote because of sickness, however, were more likely to strongly disagree with it. Quite likely, a large proportion of them would have voted if it had been convenient. A substantial number of the unenumerated (44 percent) also strongly disagreed with the statement, again suggesting that they might well have voted if given a chance.

A special word should be said here about those who did not vote because they were "away." In the course of examining the attitudinal correlates of voting listed in table 2.5, the five categories of non-voters were compared with voters in these elections. In most cases, those who did not vote because they were away from home, for whatever cause, fitted the profile of voters better than did any other group of non-voters. Their interest in politics was similar to voters', their political efficacy answers were similar, and in most cases they participated in political actions at the same rates. The conclusion seems justifiable that those who did not vote because they were away would likely have voted at approximately the same rate as the rest of the electorate had it been as simple to do so as it was for others.

Table 2.7
Attitude that there are so many voters that the individual's vote doesn't matter, by reasons for non-voting, 1974 and 1984
(percentages)

	1974				
So many voters	Away	Sick	Busy	Uninterested	Unenumerated
Strongly agree	3	8	17	12	–
Agree somewhat	12	22	–	26	48
Disagree somewhat	56	57	67	50	32
Strongly disagree	29	14	17	13	20
N	*(76)*	*(26)*	*(21)*	*(82)*	*(6)*
V			.20		
	1984				
So many voters	Away	Sick	Busy	Uninterested	Unenumerated
Strongly agree	17	12	19	30	12
Agree somewhat	16	14	32	27	25
Disagree somewhat	18	19	20	24	19
Strongly disagree	50	56	30	20	44
N	*(103)*	*(40)*	*(82)*	*(144)*	*(52)*
V			.17		

The other attitudinal variable that emerges from this analysis as being particularly important to explaining turnout is attention paid to politics in the newspapers. Table 2.8 shows the percentages of 1974 and 1984 voters and non-voters who read about the election in varying amounts.

As noted in the previous analysis, the relationship between paying attention to politics and elections in the papers and a decision to vote has strengthened somewhat between 1974 and 1984. We may still note even in 1984, however, that half the non-voters in that election paid attention to political news in the papers either "often" or "sometimes." Much the same relationship with media exposure, incidentally, exists between voting and attention paid to political or election reports on television.

Table 2.8
Reading about politics in the newspapers, by 1974 and 1984 behaviour
(percentages)

	1974		1984	
Read	Voted	Did not	Voted	Did not
Often	44	29	46	19
Sometimes	29	29	31	33
Seldom	17	22	15	29
Never	11	21	8	20
N	*(977)*	*(219)*	*(2 864)*	*(512)*
V	.15		.24	

Once again, it is useful to examine the reasons given for non-voting, grouped into five types, to determine how strong the relationship between media attention and voting is. Table 2.9 presents these data.

We see in table 2.9 that those who did not vote because they were away have a profile that looks very similar to the voters, when it comes to paying attention to politics in the newspapers. Substantial numbers of people in the other categories of non-voter, even the "uninterested," do consume political news as well. In 1984, for example, over 60 percent of the "unenumerated" said that they followed political news either "often" or "sometimes." The fact, however, that many non-voters do not pay much attention to newspapers suggests that a lack of interest in and information about the proceedings plays a part in their decision to abstain on polling day. It also suggests that any proposed changes to the electoral rules being implemented following the Commission's recommendations should be advertised in different media and forums.

To establish the relative strength of the attitudinal and behavioural predictors of voting, a series of regression analyses was performed using the 1974, 1979, 1980 and 1984 national election studies. The 1988 study was not used for this purpose because of the absence from the dataset of most of the possible predictors of voting.

Dependent variables in these analyses were of three types. The first was "vote/non-vote": whether respondents voted in the election under study. This dependent variable was constructed for all four election studies. The second was "voting frequency," in which respondents were asked whether they had voted in all, most, some or none of the federal elections held since they became eligible. This analysis is presented

Table 2.9
Reading about politics in the newspapers, by reasons for non-voting, 1974 and 1984
(percentages)

	1974				
Read	Away	Sick	Busy	Uninterested	Unenumerated
Often	46	16	28	19	20
Sometimes	29	27	31	30	16
Seldom	17	35	19	21	32
Never	7	22	23	29	32
N	*(76)*	*(25)*	*(21)*	*(86)*	*(6)*
V			.20		

	1984				
Read	Away	Sick	Busy	Uninterested	Unenumerated
Often	33	22	16	10	24
Sometimes	35	29	36	28	37
Seldom	25	20	29	34	23
Never	8	30	19	28	16
N	*(109)*	*(43)*	*(90)*	*(163)*	*(53)*
V			.22		

for 1979. The third dependent variable is "why didn't vote," and the reasons grouped into those who were away, sick or busy, and uninterested. Since these categories of non-voter are ordinal in the degree to which they resemble voters, the variable is suitable for multivariate analysis.

To summarize these various analyses, table 2.10 presents only the predictors that reached statistical significance, in their order of magnitude. Variables used in the analyses included several political efficacy measures, participation, and demographics such as age and socio-economic status.

The regression analyses presented in table 2.10 were successful in explaining between two and three times the amount of variance as those employing only demographic variables (tables 2.A3 and 2.A4). The vote/non-vote analyses explained 9% (1974), 11% (1979), 6% (1980) and 12% (1984) of the variance using the combination of attitudinal, behavioural and demographic variables in the datasets. The two

Table 2.10
Significant predictors in regression analyses of voting, 1974, 1979, 1980, 1984

Year and dependent variable	Significant predictors	Total variance explained (%)
1974		
Vote/non-vote	So many voters Age	9
Why not vote	Read politics in newspaper	15
1979		
Vote/non-vote	So many voters Socio-economic status Age	11
Vote frequency	So many voters Socio-economic status Interest in politics	14
1980		
Vote/non-vote	Read about election in newspaper Socio-economic status	6
Why not vote	Read about election in newspaper Socio-economic status	8
1984		
Vote/non-vote	Read about politics in newspaper So many voters Marital status Interest in politics Attend political meeting Material satisfaction Watch political TV Education Age Contact public officials	12
Why not vote	Read about politics in newspaper Discuss politics with friends	14

variables that we have presented earlier in this section emerge as particularly important in the multivariate analyses. "So many voters" (the belief that so many others vote in an election that it doesn't matter whether the respondent does) is the most important predictor of voting/non-voting in two of the years (1974 and 1979) and the second most important in 1984. The other variable, the extent of "reading" about politics or the election in the newspaper is the most important predictor variable of voting in 1980 and 1984. These two variables are also the most important ones in regression analyses of "why not vote," the reasons for non-voting. Those who did not vote because they were away can be best distinguished from those who did not vote because they weren't interested by the amount of political "reading" they did and their attitude on the "so many voters" question.

Once these two variables have explained their maximum variance, there were only small amounts added by the host of other variables utilized, despite the fact that some of them reached statistical significance. The 1984 regression showed many more variables that were statistically significant than did those done in the other years, but this was primarily because of the larger sample size and the fact that several of the predictor variables were asked of the whole sample in 1984 rather than the random half-sample to which they were presented in previous years. In 1984, however, the total model explained 12 percent of the variance in "vote/non-vote," but 8 percent was explained by the top two variables ("read about politics" and "so many voters") and 11 percent by the top five.

There are a number of attitudinal correlates of non-voting in Canada. The most important is the belief that one's vote is unimportant because there are so many other voters, and the chances of one's vote being decisive in the outcome are minuscule. People subscribing to this belief become "free riders," not bothering to act personally while being governed by the same outcome as others who did participate. Despite the superficial rationality of this argument, most Canadians, including those who do not vote, do not believe it. Hence the correlation is not strong with this attitude, or indeed with any other.

The behavioural characteristic of Canadians that relates most clearly to voting is the attention paid to political and election news in the newspaper. Again, however, the relationship with this action is not strong in an absolute sense. Although multivariate analysis using these attitudinal and behavioural characteristics explains more variance than those using only demographics (like age), the whole model does not fit particularly well. Like the demographic characteristics, attitudes will not overly inhibit an enhancement of the voting rate if the administrative conditions are reformed.

AGGREGATE CONSTITUENCY CHARACTERISTICS

Several of the national election study datasets contain a substantial number of non-survey variables, measuring the characteristics of the constituencies in which survey respondents lived. These were derived from census data on the occupational, ethnic and religious make-up of the ridings, as well as the percentage of unemployed they contained. Also present were variables measuring the electoral history of the ridings, the winning parties, closeness of the contests, sex and number of candidates, etc. It had been my initial hypothesis that several of these constituency-context factors would have important effects on individual decisions to vote or not.

Among the hypotheses were:

1. The closeness of the previous election in the constituency would lead to the belief that the current election might also be close and that it might be particularly important to vote this time.
2. Some ridings might have histories of consistently high or low turnout, and this tradition might affect the likelihood of voting by individuals who lived there.
3. The sex of the candidates might have an effect on turnout. In a previous analysis of aggregate predictors of the stability of individual partisanship (Pammett 1991), I discovered that the propensity of the NDP to run women as candidates had an effect on the likelihood of Progressive Conservative identifiers remaining with their party over time. Perhaps the presence of female candidates also affects the turnout rate.
4. The number of candidates in a riding might affect turnout. If non-mainstream candidates represent opinions that the three major parties do not, their presence might bring out to the ballot-box voters who did not feel themselves represented by the major parties. The more candidates there are, perhaps the more motivated voters there will be.
5. Ridings that are occupationally cohesive might have different turnout rates than the norm. In such areas, for example those that are predominantly working-class, representation of group interests might be more prominent, and mobilization on a class basis might take place. As a representative test of this hypothesis, the relationship between turnout and the proportion of the working class in the riding was examined.
6. Similarly, the effect of the unemployment rate in a constituency on the likelihood of individuals within it to vote was examined. Constituencies with high unemployment are more dependent on government assistance, and voters might be more concerned

with the outcome. Conversely, it is possible that the effect of high unemployment is to produce an atmosphere of despondency and apathy, and hence a lower turnout rate.

None of the hypotheses outlined here was supported by the data at my disposal. It may be that some of the independent variables mentioned here will relate to the aggregate turnout rate in the constituency. However, none of these variables affect appreciably the likelihood of individuals to vote or not. For example, in a 1979 regression analysis on "vote frequency," the addition of the package of six constituency characteristics of a social and political nature measuring the six hypotheses described above explained only another 1.5 percent of the variance in that dependent variable (increasing the multiple *R* from .35 to .37). It is my conclusion that this line of analysis is not likely to yield important enough results to make it worth pursuing further.

EFFECTS OF ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

The following analysis will attempt to estimate the potential changes in turnout that would be produced by a series of changes in the administration of elections. The specific changes recommended are the subject of the concluding section. In any given federal election held under the present administrative arrangements, it is likely that 75 percent of eligible voters will cast a ballot. Somewhere around 5 percent, on the other hand, will not vote under any circumstances, because they never do. The remaining 20 percent, however, might vote if some of the circumstances were changed – after all, in some elections they do vote. Let us proceed to categorize this 20 percent of the electorate according to the kind of non-voters they are.

Table 2.3 presented a fivefold division of non-voters, into those who do not participate in a given election because they are either away, sick, busy, uninterested or unenumerated. Those who did not vote because they were away, sick or unenumerated may be considered administratively disenfranchised non-voters; those who were uninterested or too busy are categorized as disinterested non-voters. Although such categorization is to some extent arbitrary, we have seen throughout this study that those who did not vote because they were away, sick or unenumerated resemble voters on criteria of sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes and other political behaviour to a greater extent than do the "uninterested," or in most cases, the "busy."

Although the administratively disenfranchised non-voters share the characteristics of voters more than do the disinterested non-voters, the two are not identical. Rather, they appear as a middle category on most relevant variables. Table 2.11 serves as an illustration of this. It presents the degrees of interest of voters in the 1984 election specifically, and in politics generally, and of the two groups of non-voters.

It can be seen from table 2.11 that more than half of the administratively disenfranchised non-voters were "very" or "fairly" interested in the election, compared with about a quarter of the disinterested non-voters. The figures for general political interest are somewhat lower as a whole, but in the same ratio between the groups of non-voters.

The above categorization places 43% of non-voters in the administratively disenfranchised group. This would come to 8.6% of the electorate in any given election (43% of the 20% of the electorate who occasionally vote but do not at any given time under current arrangements). If we assume that they would vote at the same rate as everybody else (75%), and if the administrative barriers were removed, turnout would rise by 6.5%. A more conservative assumption, given the characteristics of this group, is that half of them would vote if administrative barriers were removed. This would lead to a turnout rise of 4.3%.

However, if these administrative changes were made, a proportion of the disinterested would also vote. Some of those who claimed to be too busy, for example, could use mail-in ballots. Table 2.11 shows that about one-quarter of this group is at least fairly interested in politics and elections. By the above calculations, this group represents 11.4% of the current electorate. Assuming that fewer administrative barriers would produce a 25% turnout among this group, total turnout rises another 2.9%.

Table 2.11
Political interests of voters and non-voter types, 1984
(percentages)

		Non-voters	
	Voters	Admin. disenfranchised	Disinterested
Interest in the election			
Very interested	38	17	6
Fairly interested	40	36	18
Slightly interested	18	32	30
Not interested	4	15	45
N	*(2 865)*	*(206)*	*(276)*
Interest in politics generally			
Very interested	19	13	6
Fairly interested	47	35	16
Not much interested	34	52	78
N	*(2 861)*	*(206)*	*(275)*

The calculations made here lead to the prediction that voting turnout would rise by 7.2% if a comprehensive package of administrative changes in election procedure were made. These changes, to be discussed in the following section, would have to target all the groups of non-voters, since reforms that would allow those currently unenumerated to vote would not necessarily be relevant to those who do not vote for other reasons. More speculatively, the implementation of substantial changes in the electoral rules might affect the political culture generally; since fewer excuses for non-voting would hold water, non-voting might become less socially acceptable. If this were to happen, a total rise in voting turnout of 10% is not out of the question.

RECOMMENDED CHANGES

The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing received numerous briefs written by MPS, returning officers, chief electoral officers, party officials, interest groups and private citizens. Most of the briefs agreed on a set of changes that would increase the opportunities for various groups of current non-voters to participate.

Proxy Voting

Extensions to, and simplification of, the current system of proxy voting would allow voting for those who currently do not vote because they are away, sick or busy. Briefs recommending changes of one sort or another to the proxy voting system are those by Foster, Parmenter, McGrath, Hutmacher, the Elizabeth Fry Society, Macdonald, Dahlo, Allen, Michael, Bond, Baillie, Engelmann, Maund, the Students Union of Memorial University, Ferguson, Jefferson, Leblanc, Balasko, Riis, Roelants, the New Democratic Party, Craven, Guthrie, Madden, Whipp, Greene, MacPhail and Koutroulides.

Groups to whom the authors of the briefs mentioned above suggest proxy voting apply include students away from home, people abroad or away from home for business or vacation or winter residence, those away from home because of seasonal employment, prisoners, and those in remote or isolated areas.

My own feeling is that the lack of secrecy, and the lack of assurance to voters that the ballots were being marked in accordance with their wishes, might make proxy voting less attractive to many people than a system of mail-in ballots.

Mail-in Ballots

A system whereby those unable to vote in person would be able to mail a ballot to their returning officer would allow voting by those away, sick or busy. Such a system was suggested in briefs by McGrath, the

Elizabeth Fry Society, Michael, the John Howard Society, Fewster, the Ontario Federation of Students, Engelmann, the Canadian Federation of Students, Balasko, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the BC Federation of Labour.

The above-mentioned briefs suggest that a mail-in system could be used by those a long distance from polls in large rural ridings, the housebound, those in hospitals, students, prisoners, those working abroad, and those whose occupations take them away from home (fishermen, oilfield workers, etc.).

Mobile Polls

A system of roving mobile polling stations would capture the votes of many who otherwise would not vote because they were sick. This is suggested in briefs by Parmenter, Hutmacher, Allen, Bond, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, Balasko, Riis, Donaghey, Roelants, the John Howard Society, Bernheim and Klewchuk.

Such polls might pay visits to nursing homes and other senior citizens' residences, hospitals, the infirm at home, and prisons. The Yellowknife brief also suggests such polls visit large mine sites.

Sunday Elections

The scheduling of elections on Sundays would make it easier to vote for those who currently say they are busy. It might, however, increase the number of people who do not vote for religious reasons. If, however, a mail-in system were adopted, Christians strictly observing the "Lord's Day" would be able to vote by this method. Moving the voting from a working day to a holiday, however, might be counterproductive if it lessened the civic-duty aura surrounding voting and if it increased the number of people who were away on voting day.[1]

More Flexible List Revision

These changes would provide ways for the unenumerated to be added to the voters list. Many of those presenting briefs on this subject advocated such additions up to and including the election day itself. Briefs were from McGrath, Macdonald, Dahlo, Mayer, Baillie, Engelmann, Maund, Ferguson, Jefferson, Riis, Donaghey, Roelants, the New Democratic Party, the BC Federation of Labour, Guthrie and Greene.

APPENDIX

Table 2.A1
Percentage voting in 1984 federal election by selected demographics

Demographics	Voting
Over 60 years	88
50–59 years	88
Over $40 000	86
40–49 years	85
Professional / managers	85
Married	85
University	84
Union member	84
30–39 years	83
Manitoba / Saskatchewan	83
East	83
Quebec	82
Housewife	82
Protestant	82
Catholic	82
French	82
Male	81
Technical / college	81
White-collar	81
English	81
$20–29 000	81
Population mean	80
Female	80
Public school	80
Non-union	80
$15–19 000	79
Ontario	79
British Columbia	79
Secondary school	79
Jewish	78

Table 2.A1 (cont'd)

Demographics	Voting
$10–14 000	77
Alberta	77
Blue-collar	77
Other language	76
Under $10 000	75
Atheists	72
22–29 years	71
Other religion	71
Single	70
Unemployed	70
Student	68
18–21 years	63

Table 2.A2
Percentage voting in 1984 federal election by age and selected demographics

Demographics	18–21	22–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	Over 60
East	73	75	86	81	85	92
Quebec	68	74	85	91	89	87
Ontario	63	68	81	82	89	89
Manitoba / Saskatchewan	65	74	88	91	87	87
Alberta	60	72	74	85	83	89
British Columbia	46	71	82	81	90	88
Public school	51	50	77	80	82	86
Secondary	59	67	81	85	90	90
Technical / college	66	78	85	85	89	90
University	72	79	86	89	91	90
Professional / managers	54	80	85	89	90	86
White-collar	64	74	86	85	92	89
Blue-collar	64	67	80	82	87	93
Unemployed	61	65	76	84	74	94
Housewife	61	68	83	83	87	87
Student	66	73	63	—	81	—
Protestant	69	72	83	81	87	89
Jewish	59	82	83	78	89	74
Catholic	65	74	85	91	90	88
Other religion	49	56	66	85	93	91
Atheists	52	66	78	76	86	82

Table 2.A2 (cont'd)
Percentage voting in 1984 federal election by age and selected demographics

Demographics	18–21	22–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	Over 60
Union	72	77	85	87	91	89
Non-union	63	70	81	84	87	88
Male	62	72	83	86	90	90
Female	65	71	83	85	86	87
Under $10 000	60	57	70	83	80	86
$10–14 000	57	66	70	74	82	87
$15–19 000	65	72	79	79	84	88
$20–29 000	58	73	84	85	90	91
$30–39 000	68	70	85	86	92	92
Over $40 000	72	82	86	89	92	92
English	63	72	83	85	88	90
French	65	73	86	91	88	89
Other language	59	59	73	76	89	86
Single	64	71	75	84	80	88
Married	55	75	85	86	90	89
Other	64	60	74	80	84	86

Table 2.A3
Results of dummy forward regression on percentage voting in the 1984 federal election
(merged Gallup data, October 1984–October 1985)

Independent variables	Beta	*t*-statistic	R^2
18–21 years	-.168	-13.7	.017
22–29 years	-.183	-15.0	.038
Atheists	-.05	-5.3	.042
Under $10 000	-.06	-5.7	.045
Blue-collar	-.024	-2.4	.046
$10–14 000	-.043	-4.3	.048
30–39 years	-.083	-7.1	.050
Public school	-.09	-7.2	.052
Secondary school	-.07	-6.4	.055
Other religion	-.031	-3.3	.056
40–49 years	-.043	-4.0	.057
Catholic	-.037	3.5	.059
Marital status	-.029	-2.53	.0596
$15–19 000	-.021	-2.28	.060

Table 2.A4

Results of forced entry regression on percentage voting in the 1984 federal election
(merged Gallup data, October 1984–October 1985)

Independent variables	Beta	t-statistic	R^2
18–21 years	-.16	-11.7	.04
22–29 years	-.173	-12.5	—
30–39 years	-.085	-5.83	—
40–49 years	-.043	-3.6	—
50–59 years	-.033	-.296	—
Jewish	-.012	-1.3	.045
Other religion	-.032	-3.3	—
Atheists	-.05	-5.4	—
Catholic	-.03	3.5	—
Under $10 000	-.05	-5.4	.053
$10–14 000	-.04	-4.3	—
$15–19 000	-.02	-2.4	—
$20–29 000	-.01	-1.0	—
$30–39 000	-.01	-1.1	—
Public school	-.09	-6.6	.059
Secondary school	-.07	-5.3	—
Technical / college	-.01	-1.3	—
Marital status	-.03	-2.5	.060
White-collar	-.01	-0.9	.061
Blue-collar	-.03	-3.0	—
Housewife	-.02	-2.2	—
Unemployed	-.02	-2.4	—
Student	-.01	-1.5	—

NOTES

This study was completed in March 1991.

1. One of the anonymous reviewers of this study made the following point: "On the face of it, holding an election on a holiday might seem to enhance the chances of getting a larger number of voters to participate. Yet a change to

a Sunday election (from the current Monday) has the disadvantage of removing the "civic value" attached to the existing rules – i.e., of every employee being ensured of having a minimum of four consecutive hours within which to vote, and a statutory obligation on employers to ensure that. What this amounts to is the state enhancing an individual's capacity and encouraging an employer's public responsibility by making the voting act part of the working day. The net effect on voter turnout of a move to Sunday voting may in fact be the reverse of what was intended."

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3

REFORMING THE CONTEXT OF THE VOTING PROCESS IN CANADA

Lessons from Other Democracies

Jerome H. Black

Canada fails test of democracy with low voter turnout
(The Montreal *Gazette*, 17 October 1988)

WHAT CAN BE regarded as the more general problem that motivates this study is dramatically summed up in this rather unflattering newspaper headline,[1] which appeared during the run-up period to the last federal election. This may have surprised some who thought that the country, with turnout levels averaging around 75 percent, was doing quite well on this most fundamental indicator of democratic participation. Certainly, there is a sense in some academic quarters that the Canadian record has been a good one. For instance, one recent textbook on Canadian politics wraps the following praise around its citation of the 75 percent turnout level: "Relative to most democratic countries, Canadians participate very readily in electoral politics ... This is one of the highest rates of voter turnout in the western world" (Jackson and Jackson 1990, 92). A comparative analysis of the data yields different conclusions. The most charitable interpretation of the data compares the 75 percent figure with a cross-national average of about 80 percent, taken from industrial democracies without compulsory voting. Even if it is argued that Canadian turnout is "only" about five percentage points off the mark, this hardly places it among the "democratic" front runners. Moreover, a five-percentage-point gap is not a trivial difference: Canada is not simply below average on voter participation, it is well below average.

The charitable perspective on Canadian voter participation most likely has its origins in comparisons with the United States, where, of course, turnout is very low. But the level of turnout in the United States is quite anomalous as only Switzerland's level is inferior. Also, a chief factor accounting for the low level of U.S. participation is the nation's unique registration process, which in most states places the onus on the individual to register (Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Virtually all other democracies, including Canada, take the initiative in the registration process (or compel their citizens to register).[2] Probably the least relevant benchmark with which to compare Canada, then, is the United States.

The comparative picture actually worsens when Canada's voting levels are explicitly rank-ordered alongside the levels recorded by other countries (the basis of analysis giving rise to the newspaper headline). As will be seen, on just about every national turnout list that has been compiled by researchers, Canada ranks near the bottom. Moreover, data collected for this study will show that, based on elections throughout the 1980s, Canada ranks in 28th position out of the 33 democracies considered, and, indeed, behind many developing-area democracies, such as Botswana and Mauritius.[3]

While the cross-national data can be said to constitute, at the very least, a slight embarrassment to Canada's international image as a democracy, especially at a time when "democracy" seems to be the watchword everywhere, the real relevance of the data stems from the manner in which they highlight the problem of Canadian nonparticipation: a disturbingly large number of Canadians are not involved in the performance of an act that lies so clearly at the heart of democratic theory and practice. Even if other participation acts are, from the point of view of influencing decision makers, more effective and more directly consequential, voting remains the primordial participation act, premised as it is on the twin principles of universality and equality. The act of voting is also significant, of course, because it epitomizes the idea of political maturity and citizenship, the culmination of hard-fought historical struggles; as a result, few political rights can match the symbolism that accompanies voting. As well, no other method of political engagement has as much potential to allow for the demonstration of self-interest, manifested through a specific partisan choice, and, at the same time, to permit acknowledgement of the obligations of democratic citizenship. Indeed, because electoral participation is so bound up with citizen obligation, voter turnout is often pointed to as an index of the polity's legitimacy.

It seems, therefore, highly appropriate that a Royal Commission mandated to investigate various facets of the electoral process in Canada, including potential areas of reform, not only pay some attention to the turnout problem, but place it fairly high up on the agenda. No doubt, this will be facilitated by the current climate of opinion that has evolved from concerns about the hiatus between Charter promises and current practices. There already seems to be a considerable degree of sympathy for expanding voting opportunities for individuals who are in restricted categories or restricting situations. The publicity of recent court cases has done much in this regard, but momentum had already been building in more formal quarters. Following upon a White Paper on Election Law Reform (Canada, Privy Council Office 1986), Bill C-79, which addressed a wide variety of election-connected issues, was introduced into the House in June 1987. This important bill represented a veritable watershed with regard to the facilitation of registration and voting processes, and while it died on the Order Paper (because of unrelated questions relating to the contentious issue of election expenses), the spirit of reform it contained was kept alive by former Chief Electoral Officer Jean-Marc Hamel in his final report (Canada, Elections Canada 1989).

The interest in a more permissive voting environment, engendered by a desire to broaden the voting opportunities as a matter of principle, dovetails with the concerns about the negative implications associated with Canada's lowly turnout record. Indeed, the push for reforms is made stronger by increasing the volume of aggregate voting. This is important in light of inevitable objections about the possible costs of implementing changes, especially in an era of fiscal restraint.

Major Themes and an Overview

The main purpose of this study is to argue on behalf of alterations that will enhance the voting opportunities of citizens in Canada. The argument made in this regard is deeply rooted in a cross-national perspective. Judgements about reform possibilities in the Canadian case are informed by a consideration of the experiences of other democracies and, in particular, the institutionally linked forces that alternatively foster or inhibit voting in these other countries. Not all potentially relevant institutions are considered to the same degree, however. Much less attention is given to those characteristics of the "larger" institutional setting – such as the electoral system, compulsory voting and party system–social group linkages – that, admittedly, more powerfully condition the degree of participation. The truth of the matter is that the electoral system was unlikely to be a priority item for the Commission, compulsory voting is profoundly improbable in Canada, given the dominance of liberal principles, and cleavage alignments are not easily made the object of social engineering. Instead, the main thrust of the present preoccupation with reforms centres on the more specific legal and administrative context of voting, the smaller-scale institutional factors. These include voting processes and formats such as provisions for advance voting, the use of mail ballots, proxy voting, whether the election is held on a rest day or not, and the like. While it is highly unlikely that these attributes of the voting system figure as prominently in encouraging voter turnout, relative to other, more macro-level institutional forces, they still deserve careful consideration to ascertain what contribution they can make to increasing turnout levels. Indeed, one major reason the experiences of the other democracies are reviewed is to determine if particular characteristics of the voting system can be seen to facilitate the vote.

Two important qualifications follow immediately. First of all, the impact of a particular feature of the voting environment in maximizing turnout will not always be indicated as a major component in the consideration of its adoption. Some areas of reform should not be foregone simply because a significant "quantitative dimension" cannot be cited as justification. Certain changes, such as the establishment of mobile polling stations that visit hospitals and homes for the elderly, can certainly be championed independently of the turnout implications.

The second qualification points to an important subtheme that underlies much of the current analysis' preoccupation with the turnout issue. This second turnout problem has to do with the inequality of participation that results from the relative nonparticipation of those who are less well off or who are less favoured (e.g., in terms of income, occupation and education). While it would be wrong to suggest that there is an extraordinarily strong imbalance in voting between the "haves" and "have-nots," there is, as will be shown below, evidence that the gap is far from trivial. The implication is, of course, that unevenness in participation can lead to distortions in representation and governmental response. While it is always possible to debate the fine points about the relationships among participation, representation and response, the hard-nosed truth in politics is that those voices that are not heard are usually not heeded. Voting is supposed to be the mechanism that provides those who are less well off with the opportunity to bring their large numbers to bear, and thus to compensate for their otherwise fewer resources and the more limited participation opportunities in other domains that result. To the extent that turnout is especially low among the people who arguably most need to vote, some special recognition must be given to this particular facet of the problem.

The matter takes on a particular irony of sorts because some of the reforms that have been contemplated in the Canadian case (e.g., increased opportunities for voting in the office of the returning officer, the right to vote from overseas) are likely to facilitate voting among the more educated and those generally better able to cope with special administrative procedures, in other words, individuals who already have a higher a priori probability of voting. Indeed, the present thrust of reform, as reflected in Bill C-79, while certainly praiseworthy, could very well end up exacerbating the participation differential that currently exists.

Thus, the present study pays some attention to this facet of the turnout problem, at least where it can, and, in more specific terms, offers a discussion of reforms and changes that represent expanded voting opportunities for individuals who might otherwise not respond to the kinds of alterations that are envisaged in Bill C-79. Holding the election on a rest day might be an example of change that especially lowers the threshold of voting for the less privileged, the less skilled and/or those marginally interested in politics, that is, segments of the citizenry who have a lower a priori probability of voting.

The next section, "The Canadian Turnout and Registration Record in Comparative Perspective," considers in great detail the Canadian turnout record in the post-war era, first in absolute terms, and then, more importantly, in cross-national democratic perspective. This is done, in part, by reviewing some selected empirical studies that, while not specifically concerned with the Canadian case, do provide some sense of Canada's low ranking. Of greater value is the original data analysis undertaken here. In fact, the intended empirical analysis relies on a more comprehensive database and, as a result, can claim to be much more systematic than other studies in situating the Canadian case within the cross-national democratic context. The comparative participation results to be considered here involve more elections in more countries and over a lengthier period of time.

The problem of Canada's low levels of voting participation provides much of the inspiration behind the recommendations in this study (most of which are contained in the last section, "Reforming the Administrative and Legal Context of Voting"). Virtually all of them assume that the citizen is duly enumerated and thus limit themselves to various voting options and reforms. However, the analysis in this second section does touch upon some facets of the registration process, and while that process is not a major topic of concern here, a recommendation is nevertheless offered, namely, to allow registration on election day itself.

The third section, "The Relevance of the Macro-institutional Environment," focuses on the macro-institutional features, including the electoral system, that play a major role in shaping cross-national turnout levels. These institutional forces are not, for reasons already cited, the object of recommendations, but their consideration can still be quite insightful. Not only does a complete picture emerge from an understanding of the entire matrix of institutional forces at work, but the implications of reforms are made clearer. Most particularly, if the kinds of macro-institutional forces that operate in the Canadian setting are found to dampen turnout, then this could provide even more impetus to reshape the more immediate administrative and legal institutional context, the aim being to offset these dampening effects. This is, in fact, a lesson that emerges from this section.

The last section, "Reforming the Administrative and Legal Context of Voting," forms the heart of the analysis, leading to recommendations about reforms. It explores at length the legal and administrative context of voting in Canada and in 18 other industrial democracies. Because there have been suggested areas of change in the Canadian case, the comparative exercise is carried out not only in light of practices that are currently in place, but also by taking into account reforms that have been put forward, particularly in the white paper and Bill C-79. Based on an analysis of both the Canadian and comparative experiences, including, where possible, the implications for increasing the volume of turnout, this study offers specific vote-facilitating recommendations. Some recommendations, however, are offered without regard to the quantitative aspect, and others are discussed with particular reference to turnout equality.

This introductory part of this study needs to attend to four more matters before the analysis can properly turn, in the second section, to the comparative turnout picture. These are taken up in the following sections. The first involves a justification that turnout inequality is, indeed, a significant problem, worthy of reform considerations. The discussion concludes that the best evidence points to nontrivial, indeed moderately strong, turnout differences between the better off and the worse off.

The second matter emphasizes the importance of institutions in affecting turnout. This justifies the attention paid to the institutional setting and, consequently, thoughts about how that environment might be reformed. The third item of discussion provides an additional impetus for the serious consideration of reform, namely, evidence from survey data demonstrating that a substantial proportion of citizens in Canada fail to vote because of administrative difficulties. This implies that remedying the problems would facilitate their participation, potentially raising the turnout rate, the data suggest, to 85 percent. The final section discusses the countries that are considered here as part of the comparative exercise.

The Equality of Turnout

Turnout inequality has a specific empirical basis: the variability of participation across various socio-economic indicators. To the extent that there is little variability, that is, to the extent that similar levels of voting occur in all the categories that differentiate between the "haves" and "have-nots," the concern about inequality is diminished. Interestingly, in spite of an enormous amount of voting research carried out in Canada, turnout–demographic relationships have received very little attention, and certainly not the kind of attention required for a sophisticated understanding of the nature of the relationships. Fortunately, however, there are two competent and informative studies written for the Royal Commission that represent major and timely exceptions: Pammett (1991) and Eagles (1991). Their consideration shines some light on the question of turnout inequality.

Pammett, working with a pooled data set consisting of Gallup surveys for the period October 1984 to October 1985, finds that demographic factors do have a bearing upon turnout, measured as claimed participation in the 1984 federal election, but only in modest terms; moreover, it is age that has the strongest impact. His initial (bivariate) tables show that occupation has a moderately small (but statistically significant) influence; for example, turnout is, in increasing order, 68 percent among students, 70 percent among the unemployed, 77 percent among blue-collar workers, 81 percent among those in clerical or sales jobs, 82 percent among housewives and 85 percent among professional or business people (Pammett 1991, table 2.4). A similar relationship is observed for income. Seventy-four percent of those with a family income under $10 000 voted in 1984 (or claimed to do so); among those with a household income of $40 000 or over, 86 percent voted. This does not represent a huge difference, yet it is noticeable nevertheless (ibid.). For education, the effect is barely noticeable, with only a few percentage points differentiating turnout between the least and best educated in the combined sample (ibid., table 2.A1).

Eagles (1991), on the other hand, examining the last three general elections and using constituency-based aggregate data, finds that his three socio-economic measures (percent low income families, percent with university degrees, percent managers and administrators) constitute quite important explanatory variables. To be sure, the three form different patterns of association across the three elections (e.g., income is statistically significant in all three cases, education once and occupation twice). These patterns invite further inquiry, but the most immediate feature of the analysis is the significant amount of the variation in across-constituency turnout explained by these variables or subsets. Indeed, these variables plus a few other demographic items easily outperform the political mobilization variables that are also considered. However the mobilizing context may be measured – a matter not considered here – it is hard to see how any alterations would undo the finding that the demographic context by itself matters a great deal.

The response adopted here in confronting the modest socio-economic-participation results reported by Pammett and the fairly strong ones reported by Eagles turns on methodological issues. A consideration of these issues is taken up in Appendix A and leads to the conclusion that Eagles has probably overestimated the impact of socio-economic variables somewhat, while it is highly likely that Pammett's analysis has underestimated their impact considerably. The true relationship appears to be moderately strong.

The Importance of Institutions for Turnout

The literature, cited extensively below, clearly demonstrates that institutions do play an important role in accounting for variations in turnout. Even many studies (e.g., Crewe 1981; Powell 1986) that point to the significance for participation of the resources and capabilities of individuals (e.g., education, income) or their psychological orientations or political cultural values (e.g., political interest, efficacy) readily acknowledge that institutions matter a great deal. Indeed, some would claim that they matter more. Jackman (1987) specifically argues that institutions are weightier explanations of cross-national variations in turnout than are culturally associated attitudes, such as those discussed in Almond and Verba's (1963) classic study: "That voter turnout should respond to institutional patterns makes good intuitive sense. Voting is everywhere systematically governed by laws and institutional arrangements that vary markedly from nation to nation ... Because it is an institutionalized form of political behavior, then, the volume of voter turnout would seem potentially more responsive than other varieties of mass political behavior to laws and procedures" (Jackman 1987, 406). The present focus on the impact of institutions on voter participation should not, however, be taken to mean that political culture and other noninstitutional factors have no relevance whatsoever for understanding Canadian turnout; indeed, the latter might play some role.[4] Rather, the present restriction merely reflects acknowledgement of the Commission's mandate and the limits of social engineering.

For similar reasons, interest here centres on the subset of institutional forces that constitute the more immediate administrative and legal context of voting. Their effect on inhibiting or facilitating turnout manifests itself in terms of the costs of voting. The idea is simple, not at all controversial, but quite important: more people vote when the costs of doing so are low. Thus, where the voting environment makes it easy for individuals to register and to vote, more will do so. The justification for considering many of the reforms that have already been voiced and that are raised here centres on diminishing the costs of voting.

This same principle means that turnout will be more strongly affected by the larger cost factors (and, in some cases, incentives) associated with the macro-institutional arrangements (such as the electoral system) than it will be by the more immediate institutional arrangements, such as advance voting opportunities and the like. Nevertheless, even if the connection is more modest, it is worth considering, for as Crewe points out: "A modest raising of the inconvenience of voting should sharply reduce turnout" (1981, 219). There is, therefore, a theoretically plausible basis for an investigation of the micro-institutional context and, indeed, for pushing ahead with voting reforms.

The Possibility of 85 Percent Turnout

A further impetus for reform is provided by knowledge derived from surveys regarding the motivations for non-voting among Canadian citizens. Pammett's (1991) analysis, in particular (but see also Mishler 1979), reveals that only a minority of the non-voters in each of the election surveys of 1974, 1980 and 1984 that he considers failed to vote because they were not interested; most indicated reasons that could be made the object of reform and vote facilitation: being away, sick, busy or unenumerated. In 1974, the percentages of non-voters corresponding to these four categories were: 38, 13, 10 and 2 (a total of 63%); in 1980, the percentages were 39, 13, 2 and 6 (a total of 60%); and, in 1984, the percentages were 23, 9, 19 and 11 (a total of 62%) (Pammett 1991, table 2.3). However, this does not mean that about 60% of the 25% (i.e., an additional 15%) who do not vote could, under the "right conditions," be brought to the polls. After all, some of these individuals are "transitional voters," sometimes voting, sometimes not, depending upon the particular stimuli of the election. The more realistic figure, in terms of what can be added to the traditional turnout rate, is about

10 percentage points. This is what Pammett reckons could be the increase in turnout with the adoption of a "package of administrative changes in the conduct of elections" (see also Black 1990).

A turnout rate of 85 percent would, nevertheless, represent a dramatic improvement for Canada. As already intimated, the average turnout rate among voluntary voting democracies is about 80 percent, so Canada would be well above the international average if it were to achieve such a level of participation. Moreover, as will be noted, a turnout rate of 85 percent would move Canada from the bottom of the rankings of democracies into the top half.

Choosing the Comparative Democratic Context

Deciding which democracies to use in the analysis is not as straightforward a process as might be thought. The difficulty does not stem from any disagreement about how to define democracy or which set of criteria polities must meet in order to be considered democratic. All definitions converge on the principal idea of governmental legitimacy rooted in the mass public – "government by the people" – and, the key corollary, responsiveness to the preferences of the public – "government for the people." Moreover, formulations about the appropriate set of criteria all tend to highlight two interrelated clusters of conditions – competitive and fair elections, incorporating extensive participation opportunities, on the one hand, and freedoms and liberties of expression and involvement, on the other (Butler et al. 1981a; Dahl 1971; Lijphart 1984; Powell 1986). The challenge of classification arises from uncertainty about how well different polities stack up against these criteria, since all regimes deviate to some extent from the definitional ideal. In the real world of imperfect democracy, the "inevitable" constraints on some aspects of freedoms – for example, a franchise that is partially restricted or the existence of a dominant party that persistently wins though elections are competitive – are the sorts of specific difficulties that pose challenges for the classification exercise.

Longevity (and stability) of the democratic regime represents another dimension that affects the decision about which democratic countries to consider. At the one extreme, there is the snapshot view, which may emphasize, especially, the latest status for each country. One of the best known is Freedom House's *Freedom in the World*, which perennially rates countries as either "free" (i.e., democratic), partially free or not free. The results of the 1984 survey, for example, listed "fifty free countries that can reasonably be called democracies" (Gastil 1985, 9). This is not very satisfactory since some of these countries were not on earlier lists (while other nations no longer appeared on later lists).

Persistence is critical. How well a polity can cultivate and maintain its democratic roots in a publicly based legitimacy – perhaps more exactly, how much it can count on a reserve of legitimacy when times are difficult – is the acid test, and it is a test that can only be viewed from a chronological perspective. But how long is long enough? Here, too, different students of democracy have reached different operational decisions. One approach is the polar opposite of the snapshot perspective, and it underscores continuity essentially throughout the entire period after the Second World War. On this basis, the following countries can be identified: the familiar democracies of North America (Canada, the United States) and Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom), as well as Australia, Israel, Japan and New Zealand.

Based on the view that continuity is important, the countries noted – which also generally meet the democratic criteria set out as benchmarks – form the principal basis of comparative analysis carried out on the Canadian case. Their turnout records and voting environments establish the primary frame of reference within which the Canadian case is judged. The fact that these democracies are also industrial societies is also relevant, as is the simple fact that there is a legacy of their inclusion in cross-national analysis. That more information, especially in connection with details of the voting environment, is more readily available for these countries is an additional practical consideration. This is one reason why Iceland and Luxembourg are not included as part of the primary comparative analysis, though some might argue their tiny population base is another "disqualifying" factor.

However, these two countries are considered, if only briefly, when the turnout records of a wider set of democracies, beyond these initial ones, are examined. This second comparative assessment of turnout also works in a few other countries on the premise that a timeframe less than the entire post-war period allows consideration of other countries that perhaps ought not to be totally ignored. For example, Greece's return to the democratic fold is a significant event, as is the emergence of Portugal and Spain from authoritarian pasts.

A narrower timeframe also facilitates the consideration of democracies in developing areas, whose turnout records are incorporated in a third step aimed at assessing the relative participation performance of Canada. Powell (1982) captures some developing-areas countries with his operational procedure of five years of uninterrupted democratic rule over the 1958–76 interval. In the present case, a 10-year span is used. All independent countries that were democratic throughout the 1980s (especially in terms of competitive elections) were considered, provided they had a population of 250 000 or more – although for some of these polities, reliable turnout information could not be easily obtained.

A consideration of the turnout record of these additional countries provides a more comprehensive view of the Canadian case; as the next section shows, it is not a flattering perspective.

THE CANADIAN TURNOUT AND REGISTRATION RECORD IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Virtually all the recommendations made in this study (in the last section) about facilitating opportunities for voting in Canada assume that the individual is duly registered. The recommendations thus limit themselves to various options and reforms that bear directly on the act of voting. In this section, however, one recommendation that is made in conjunction with the registration process favours registration on election day itself. This recommendation follows a line of analysis that begins with the important task of providing a detailed portrayal of the mediocre turnout record in Canada.

This is done principally by comparing Canada's record to the experience of other industrial democracies. This is not to say that comparative perspectives are lacking in the literature. Indeed, as will be noted, there are a few published renderings which, while not specifically preoccupied with the Canadian case, do depict Canada's relative low ranking. Nevertheless, the present analysis can claim to be much more systematic in situating the Canadian case within the cross-national democratic context, not least because it draws upon a more comprehensive database. Next to existing studies, the current effort allows consideration of turnout results from more elections in more countries and this over an extended time period. The present exercise differs from others by explicitly focusing on the Canadian case. To that end, the analysis begins with a characterization of the turnout record in Canada for the general elections beginning in 1945 and ending with the most recent federal contest in 1988. This post-war portrayal of turnout will not only set up the Canadian case for eventual cross-national assessment, it will also allow for a discussion of some methodological and operational procedures that must be addressed as part of any serious analysis of election turnout, be it directed toward one country or many.

The first concern in this regard has to do with the inclusion of invalid votes in turnout tallies. This has become standard practice among analysts, who have come to recognize that many spoiled ballots or those purposefully left blank represent a form of purposeful participation. At least among those nations with voluntary voting, the difference between those who visit the polling station and those who do not embodies the more salient dichotomy. No doubt, the decision to include invalid votes for this reason is reinforced by practical considerations, given that different countries judge the invalidity of ballots in various ways (Powell 1982). Analysts are not alone in citing summary figures with the invalid ballots included. Many government reporting agencies, including Elections Canada, tend to do so as well.

The denominator used in generating the turnout figure is more problematic in comparative studies because there are different definitions of the universe of potential voters. The familiar one, used by Elections Canada and most official agencies in other countries, is the number registered as electors. Turnout, thus measured, is the percentage of those registered who actually vote. Such a methodology would probably be the only one utilized were it not for the anomalous registration process in the United States, the only democratic country where the onus to register rests with the individual, and yet where no sanctions are in place requiring such an initiative. The registration barriers in most states are so significant that they go a long way toward explaining much of the massive amount of non-voting in the United States (Powell 1986; Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), and they effectively render votes cast as a percentage of those registered a measure of limited utility for understanding electoral participation in that country. Perhaps more to the point, accurate national registration figures are simply not available, given that individual states control and keep tabs on the registration system (e.g., see Piven and Cloward 1988). Thus, U.S. scholars use the number of age-eligible in the population as the denominator in their approach to comparison. Such data are derived from published population (typically census) statistics.

There are, however, some advantages associated with the use of the resulting turnout measure even when the focus is not on the United States. As will be emphasized below, when the registration effort results in a substantially incomplete enumeration (itself gauged by taking into account the age-eligible), votes cast as a percentage of the voting age population may be a useful turnout measure to ponder. At the same time, this measure is only as good as the population data available. Often, data contemporaneous to the elections of interest must be based on estimates, typically generated from earlier census data or extrapolations, themselves based on estimates. A bit of guesswork is also called for in connection with the age categories since they rarely correspond to the particular, and occasionally shifting, voting age requirement currently in effect. That some population counts are de facto, others de jure, is another confounding factor and a source of unwanted variation in comparative analysis.[5] Related to this are the problems surrounding citizenship as a criterion of eligibility. To the extent that there is a large number of non-citizens in the population, as indeed is the case in Canada, participation based on the voting age population will underestimate the "true" turnout level. Unfortunately, data that might correct for this are not always available.

For these reasons, in addition to the simple fact that the United States is the oddity in cross-national terms, predominant use is made of the registration-based turnout measure. Whatever advantages can be had from the alternative measure will be exploited only after the registration-based item has been employed in as systematic a way as is possible.

Turnout in Canadian General Elections, 1945–88

As table 3.1 shows, post-war turnout in Canadian general elections averaged around 75 percent.[6] It is a participation level that fluctuates modestly, from a low of 67 percent in the 1953 election to a high of 79 percent in the two elections in the early 1960s. If there is any discernible trend in the data over time, it is certainly not monotonic; if anything, there appears to be a curvilinear pattern. Turnout rates at the beginning and end of the period are about the same, around 75 percent, but rise slightly during the Diefenbaker period, which included back-to-back minority governments, and which perhaps reflected a greater degree of competitiveness between the two older parties.

At the same time, the 75 percent figure is a fair representation of the entire series of elections. Nine of the fifteen elections had turnout rates that were within two percentage points of the average figure. This stability in turnout corresponds to what the comparative literature has emphasized as being true of turnout over time levels in most other democratic countries. This suggests that continuity in the institutional and political context, which typifies most countries, leads to a steady level of turnout, and that understanding these differences of context constitutes the main task of comparative turnout analysis (Crewe 1981; Jackman 1987).

The observed deviations from the post-war summary turnout figure are slightly larger on the negative side, and more particularly in connection with the elections in 1953, 1974 and 1980 (67 percent, 71 percent and 69 percent, respectively). Seasonal factors probably played some role in dampening turnout rates in these three elections. The 1980 election was held in the middle of the winter season, ordinary polling day being on 18 February. Similarly, the 1953 election campaign was waged in the heart of summer, with election day on 10 August. The

Table 3.1
Turnout rates for Canadian general elections, 1945–88
(percentages)

11 June 1945	76
27 June 1949	74
10 August 1953	67
10 June 1957	74
31 March 1958	79
18 June 1962	79
8 April 1963	79
8 November 1965	75
25 June 1968	76
30 October 1972	77
8 July 1974	71
22 May 1979	76
18 February 1980	69
4 September 1984	75
21 November 1988	75
Post-war average	74.8

Source: Canada, Elections Canada, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer.*

1974 election also took place during the summer (8 July). But what of the other elections held during the summer period, typically viewed as starting from 21 June? Turnout in 1949 (27 June) and 1968 (25 June) barely deviate from the 75 percent norm. The explanation probably has to do with the fact that the vacation season does not really begin until July, and certainly not at the end of June in those jurisdictions where children are still in school.[7] This seems to reinforce the notion that the 75 percent figure tends to be the norm.

This study seeks to understand the permissive and inhibiting features of the voting environment that are general and enduring, so there is little more to be said about the always present possibility that political circumstances can sometimes lead to the holding of elections outside of the spring or fall periods. There is, however, a methodological lesson to learn. Given that there will always be some particular set of idiosyncratic factors operating for each election, including the possibility that it might be held "out of season," it seems best to work with turnout rates based on some sort of pooling across elections, so that election-specific vagaries do not overwhelm conclusions. Variability in the accuracy of the electoral registration process also figures in as an argument for examining turnout rates averaged over a period of time. Crewe, for example, points out that the accuracy of the register can vary from one election to the next by a couple of percentage points, and thus represents an idiosyncratic source of change over time. He counsels that "reliance should be confined to substantial differences and to averages based on a series of elections" (1981, 233). Finally, there are several precedents (but see Blais and Carty 1990) in the literature for pooling across elections. Indeed, in several important studies (Jackman 1987; Powell 1986), the decade is indicated as the preferred time period. The same timeframe is adopted here.

The turnout figures can be recast as decade averages, as table 3.2 shows, save for a five-year period in the case of the 1940s. These aggregated statistics derive from the simple averaging of no less than three elections for the decade-long periods and two for the half decade. The results of the aggregation, however, do not alter very much the image already conveyed by the individual election results, though the curvilinear pattern may be slightly more intricate. Note that there is a small drop in average turnout rates from the 1940s to the 1950s, followed by a more sizable increase and then a decline across the next two decades. It is unclear whether there is a single explanation for the various turns in the data; again, the first turn might be entirely explained by the summer election of 1953.[8] Alternatively, it would not be out of the question to view the data as forming a quasi-random spread, with the decade averages hovering above and below the 75 percent mark.

Table 3.2
Turnout rates for Canadian general elections

	Number of elections	Decade average
1940s	2	75.0
1950s	3	73.3
1960s	4	77.3
1970s	3	74.7
1980s	3	73.0

Source: Canada, Elections Canada, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer.*

If the Canadian turnout rate has been fairly stable, this does not mean that Canada's turnout ranking relative to other countries has held steady. Data collected for this study clearly indicate that Canada's participation ranking, low to begin with, has been deteriorating over time. However, the message that Canadian turnout levels fall short of levels achieved in most other countries can be gleaned from a few existing studies.

Canadian Turnout in Comparative Perspective

Results from two of these comparative studies are shown in table 3.3.[9] In the left column are data taken from a study by Glass et al. (1984), which shows, for 24 countries, the turnout levels in the most recent election (as of 1981). For the Canadian case, this means the election of 1980, in which turnout was about 69 percent, a figure that puts Canada in 19th place. A more appropriate basis of comparison is formed by the 19 countries that do not have compulsory voting, but, of course, given that no country with compulsory voting has a turnout level lower than Canada's, this delimitation does not alter the dismal Canadian ranking. Canada still ranks ahead of only five countries. One could object to these figures, given that only single election results are provided, and especially given that the 1980 election (held in the middle of winter) is associated with a level of participation some five or six points off what is the "normal" level. Unfortunately, this is not noted by the authors, so the reported figure, and the accompanying unfavourable impression it conveys, are what would stick with the casual reader. However, even if the more representative figure of 75 percent were employed, or, for that matter, the more favourable 1979 election (which witnessed a turnout level of about 76 percent) were used, the attendant improvement in rankings would amount to one spot, perhaps two.

The other column of participation data represents the efforts of Crewe (1981), and while his is a slightly older study, it does have the virtue of relying on turnout averages. Indeed, he combines participation records for the entire post-war period, from 1945 to typically the late 1970s, though in the Canadian case the last election incorporated is the 1972 contest. Here, too, the lamentable ranking of Canada, with an average turnout figure of 76.4 percent, is plainly seen. Of the 20 democracies listed, Canada is in 15th place. Setting aside the four countries with compulsory voting (Australia, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, 1945–67), the new arrangement puts Canada in 12th spot out of 16. Crewe also reports additional turnout data for other countries that were less consistently democratic throughout the period of his analysis. When the three voluntary voting countries among those that have higher turnout rates than Canada are factored into the list, Canada drops into 20th place (Crewe 1981, table 10–3).

Table 3.3
Two existing studies of comparative turnout in various democracies
(percentages)

	Glass et al. (1984)		Crewe (1981)	
Rank	Most recent election turnout, as of 1981		Average turnout since 1945	
1	Belgium	94.6	Australia	95.4
2	Australia	94.5	Netherlands	94.7
3	Austria	91.6	Austria	94.2
4	Sweden	90.7	Italy	92.6
5	Italy	90.4	Belgium	92.5
6	Iceland	89.3	New Zealand	90.4
7	New Zealand	89.0	Germany	86.9
8	Luxembourg	88.9	Denmark	85.8
9	Germany	88.6	Sweden	84.9
10	Netherlands	87.0	Israel	81.4
11	France	85.9	Norway	80.8
12	Portugal	84.2	France	79.3
13	Denmark	83.2	Finland	79.0
14	Norway	82.0	United Kingdom	76.9
15	Greece	78.6	**Canada**	**76.4**
16	Israel	78.5	Ireland	74.7
17	United Kingdom	76.3	Japan	73.1
18	Japan	74.5	Switzerland	64.5
19	**Canada**	**69.3**	India	58.7
20	Spain	68.1	United States	58.5
21	Finland	64.3		
22	Ireland	62.2		
23	United States	52.6		
24	Switzerland	48.3		

Note: Turnout based on registration figures, except for the United States (voting-age population).

Below, a comparative data analysis specifically carried out for this study will provide an opportunity to see Canadian turnout placed beside the participation levels of most countries that could have been thought of as democratic throughout the 1980s. However, initial comparisons involve those democracies that were mentioned in the introduction as constituting the primary basis of comparison. As in the Canadian case, the analysis will proceed using decade averages. Appendix B lists, for each country, the relevant national elections along with the main sources used to gather the turnout information. The particular types of elections used are the ones that are routinely chosen by scholars studying turnout, those that "determine most directly the control of the chief executive" (Powell 1986, 24) – presidential elections in the United States and Fifth Republic France, elsewhere elections for the national legislatures. In all cases, official vote reports are used and, as far as possible, totals that include valid and invalid votes. The figures initially shown are registration-based turnout percentages, for all countries except for the United States, for which age-eligible figures are presented.

The first comparisons made of the Canadian case and these 18 other democracies, as shown in table 3.4, are summary ones, based upon a pooling of the turnout rates in the other countries. The data are depicted in graph form in figure 3.1. Turnout in elections in the 1940s in these other democracies averaged 82.1%, rose slightly in two steps over the next two decades (82.7% and 83.1%) and then dropped off slightly, again in two steps, to 81.5% in the 1970s and 80.6% in the 1980s. The percentages include those countries in which voting is compelled, so it may not be surprising to note that the gap between these averages and the Canadian ones is quite substantial, varying from a high of 9.4 percentage points in the 1950s to a low of 5.8 during the very next decade. Overall, the mean deficit is a substantial 7.3 points. It is at least interesting to observe that the percentage difference is about the same at the beginning and end of the period considered.

The third column in table 3.4 and the middle line in figure 3.1 constitute fairer reference points, since the decade averages include only the 13 countries (14 as of the 1970s) in which voting is voluntary.[10] Nonetheless, Canadian turnout levels continue to be distinguished by a voting rate that is substantially less than that of the average voluntary voting democracy. Juxtaposed against a Canadian norm of 74.8% for the entire post-war period is a cross-national figure of 79.1%. To put a little more detail into the comparison, turnout in the other democracies is consistently greater than in the Canadian case throughout the period in question; participation starts out at 78.6% and 79.3% in the first two decades, reaches a high point of 80.1% in the 1960s and then falls back slightly, first to 79.1%, and then to 78.2%. The corresponding gap is lowest (2.8 points) in the 1960s and highest (6.0 points) in the 1950s. The second highest gap is in the 1980s; in fact, at the close of this period, turnout differences are larger than they were in the latter half of the 1940s.

How relevant to the comparison is the fact that the turnout picture for the voluntary voting countries also dips over the period from the 1960s to 1980s? The answer is not at all, and, in fact, the turnout situation in Canada is arguably worse once that dip is understood to be largely the result of declining participation in two particular countries, the United States and Switzerland. In the former country, turnout for the 1960s stood at 61.9%, but then dropped to 54.4% and 52.0% in the next two decades. In the other federation, not only did turnout fall off over the decades, it did so in accelerated fashion. Switzerland's turnout rate was 71.7% in the 1940s and 69.0% in the 1950s, but it dropped to 64.2%, then to 52.5% and finally to 47.5% over the next three decades – an overall decline of nearly 25 percentage points. It would not be unreasonable to argue that these two countries could be put to the side

Table 3.4
Turnout rates for Canada and other democratic countries
(decade averages)

Decade	Canada	All other democracies	Voluntary voting democracies	Voluntary voting democracies excluding Switzerland, United States
1940s	75.0	82.1	78.6	81.8
1950s	73.3	82.7	79.3	82.0
1960s	77.3	83.1	80.1	82.9
1970s	74.7	81.5	79.1	83.0
1980s	73.0	80.6	78.2	82.6
N		*(17/18)*[a]	*(13/15)*[a,b]	*(11/13)*[a,b]

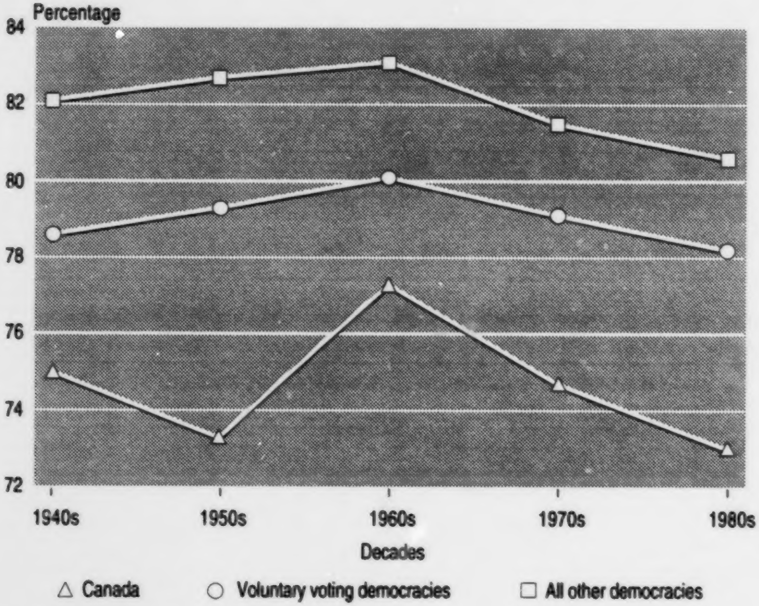
Sources: Canada, Elections Canada, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer*; for other countries, see Appendix B.

Notes: Turnout based on registration figures, except for the United States (voting-age population).

[a] France included as of the 1960s.

[b] Netherlands included as of the 1970s.

Figure 3.1
Turnout rates for Canada and other democracies, decade averages

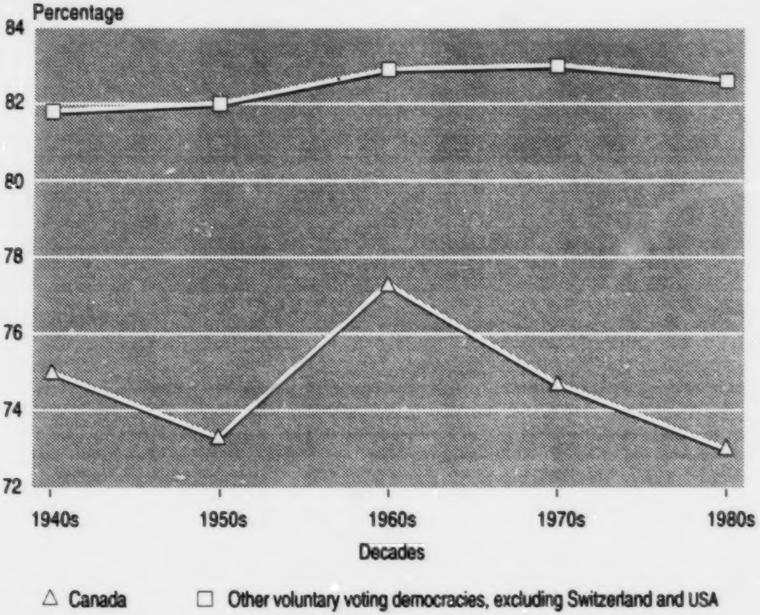


Source: See table 3.4.

in comparative analysis, not simply because they have low and declining turnout rates but, more importantly, because their participation patterns are anomalous and appear to be explained by factors unique to the two countries.[11]

Once the United States and Switzerland are removed from the analysis, the curvilinear pattern disappears (as can be seen in the third and fourth columns of table 3.4 and in figure 3.2); the new configuration suggests, if anything, a slight overall increase in turnout over the entire post-war period. Turnout is 81.8% in the 1940s, 82.0% in the 1950s and 82.9% in the 1960s, then rises to a peak of 83.0% the next decade, and falls back slightly in the 1980s (82.6%). As can be seen, the differences between these levels and the Canadian levels are large, increasing over time. The gap is the smallest in the 1960s (5.6%), but rises sharply to 8.3% in the 1970s and 9.6% in the 1980s. In no sense is there a picture of a situation that is improving. If anything, the opposite is true. By the 1980s, Canadian turnout levels remained almost 10 full percentage points behind the typical voluntary voting democracy.

Figure 3.2
Turnout rates for Canada and other voluntary voting democracies, excluding Switzerland and USA, decade averages



Source: See table 3.4.

Another perspective on how poorly Canadian turnout rates compare derives from a consideration of the same data in rank-order terms. If the participation rates of Canada and the other democracies over time are arrayed from highest to lowest, the best relative performance on the part of Canada occurs in the latter part of the 1940s, as seen in table 3.5. With an average turnout rate of 75.0 percent, Canada ranks in 13th position, or, more appropriately, ninth among the 14 voluntary voting nations. The next decade witnesses a drop in ranking of three positions, followed, in the 1960s, by a recovery of two spots. In the 1970s, Canada falls to the 16th rank or 13th among the voluntary voting countries. Canada has the same ranking in the 1980s, a noticeable decrease over its standing in the late 1940s or the 1960s. By the 1980s, only three countries – Japan, Switzerland and the United States – have inferior turnout records. More generally, this view of the data in rank-order terms reinforces a pattern of deterioration.

Table 3.5
Turnout rates in Canada and 18 other democracies
(decade averages)

Rank	1940s		1950s		1960s[a]		1970s		1980s	
1	New Zealand	95.8	Netherlands	95.4[b]	Australia	95.3[b]	Australia	95.3[b]	Australia	94.3[b]
2	Austria	95.6	Austria	95.3	Netherlands	95.0[b]	Belgium	92.7[b]	Belgium	93.8[b]
3	Australia	95.0[b]	Italy	93.8[b]	Austria	93.8	Austria	92.3	Austria	91.5
4	Netherlands	93.4[b]	Belgium	93.1[b]	Italy	92.9[b]	Italy	92.2[b]	New Zealand	90.5
5	Belgium	92.4[b]	Australia	91.9[b]	Belgium	91.3[b]	Germany	90.9	Italy	89.8[b]
6	Italy	90.7[b]	New Zealand	91.3	New Zealand	89.1	Sweden	90.4	Sweden	89.1
7	Israel	86.9	Germany	86.8	Denmark	87.3	Denmark	87.3	Germany	87.3
8	Denmark	86.1	Denmark	83.8	Germany	87.1	France	85.2	France	86.2
9	Sweden	82.7	United Kingdom	80.3	Sweden	86.4	New Zealand	85.1	Denmark	86.1
10	Norway	79.2	Israel	79.8	Finland	85.0	Netherlands	83.5	Netherlands	83.4
11	Germany	78.5	Norway	78.8	Israel	82.8	Norway	81.6	Norway	83.1
12	Finland	76.0	Sweden	78.7	Norway	82.7	Finland	81.1	Israel	79.0
13	**Canada**	**75.0**	Finland	76.5	France	78.1	Israel	79.0	Finland	78.2
14	Ireland	74.2	Japan	75.9	**Canada**	**77.3**	Ireland	76.5	Ireland	74.2
15	United Kingdom	72.6	Ireland	74.3	United Kingdom	76.6	United Kingdom	75.1	United Kingdom	74.0

Table 3.5 (cont'd)
Turnout rates in Canada and 18 other democracies
(decade averages)

Rank	1940s		1950s		1960s[a]		1970s		1980s	
16	Switzerland	71.7	**Canada**	**73.3**	Ireland	74.2	**Canada**	**74.7**	**Canada**	**73.0**
17	Japan	71.4	Switzerland	69.0	Japan	71.8	Japan	71.1	Japan	71.4
18	United States	51.1	United States	60.5	Switzerland	64.2	United States	54.4	United States	52.0
19					United States	61.9	Switzerland	52.5	Switzerland	47.5
Canada's turnout ranking among:	(1940s)		(1950s)		(1960s)		(1970s)		(1980s)	
1. All countries	13/18		16/18		14/19		16/19		16/19	
2. Voluntary voting countries only	9/14		12/14		10/15		13/16		13/16	

Sources: See Appendix B.

Notes: Turnout based on registration figures, except for the United States (voting-age population).

[a] France included as of the 1960s.

[b] Compulsory voting.

As indicated in the introduction, although these democracies constitute the primary basis of comparison, broader perspectives on Canadian turnout are possible with the inclusion of more democracies. Five additional countries – the two small long-lived democracies, Iceland and Luxembourg, the renewed democracy, Greece, and two democracies born in the 1970s, Portugal and Spain – can be incorporated into the analysis, as seen in table 3.6. (The turnout figures are for the 1980s.) While it can be expected that the participation levels of the two compulsory voting systems, Luxembourg and Greece, will outrank the Canadian, it also turns out that the other three countries do so as well. Iceland, with an average turnout of 89.2%, is near the top of the list. But even Portugal and Spain rank ahead of Canada, and Portugal does so in a fairly decisive way, with an average turnout of 76.8% for its elections in the 1980s. Even if one were not to make too much of the 0.4% difference between the Canadian and Spanish levels of participation, surely the fact that Canada is on par with a country with such a short democratic history is instructive enough. Altogether, Canada is in the 21st position among the 24 1980s Western democracies, and in 16th position among the 19 countries without compulsory voting. Either way, Canada remains fourth from last.

The inclusion of democracies from the developing world provides the last and certainly widest perspective. As noted in the introduction, the criteria for including these (independent) countries consisted of a population of at least 250 000 and maintenance of democratic standards, especially competitive elections, throughout the 1980s. Once these democracies are included, the list now expands to 33, as table 3.7 shows. Costa Rica has compulsory voting (though turnout is "only" 78.9%), but among the others, the Bahamas (90.3%), Venezuela (84.3%) and Mauritius (80.1%) have substantially higher rates of voting than does Canada, as do Barbados (77.3%), Jamaica (77.1%) and Botswana (76.0%). Astonishingly, the Canadian turnout record is superior to only two developing-areas democracies – India, and Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, once again, an expansion of the pool of democracies considered worsens the portrayal of the Canadian position. Canadian turnout in the 1980s places it in 28th position among the 33 countries and in 22nd position among the 27 countries that do not oblige its citizenry to vote. Alternatively stated, Canada ranks in sixth-to-last position. By any method of judgement, Canadian turnout rates fall miserably short of the standard of voting routinely achieved by many other democracies.

Earlier in this study, mention was made of an 85 percent turnout rate as a possible target. Given the comparative data, the implications

Table 3.6
Turnout rates in Canada and 23 other democracies, 1980s

Rank		
1	Australia	94.3[a]
2	Belgium	93.8[a]
3	Austria	91.5
4	New Zealand	90.5
5	Italy	89.8[a]
6	Iceland	89.2
7	Sweden	89.1
8	Luxembourg	88.1[a]
9	Germany	87.3
10	France	86.2
11	Denmark	86.1
12	Netherlands	83.4
13	Norway	83.1
14	Greece	82.0[a]
15	Israel	79.0
16	Finland	78.2
17	Portugal	76.8
18	Ireland	74.2
19	United Kingdom	74.0
20	Spain	73.4
21	**Canada**	**73.0**
22	Japan	71.4
23	United States	54.3
24	Switzerland	47.5

Sources: Mackie and Rose (1982); *European Journal of Political Research*, *Electoral Studies*.

Notes: Turnout based on registration figures, except for the United States (voting-age population).

[a] Compulsory voting.

Table 3.7
Turnout rates in Canada and 32 other democracies, 1980s

Rank		
1	Australia	94.3[a]
2	Belgium	93.8[a]
3	Austria	91.5
4	New Zealand	90.5
5	Bahamas	90.3
6	Italy	89.8[a]
7	Iceland	89.2
8	Sweden	89.1
9	Luxembourg	88.1[a]
10	Germany	87.3
11	France	86.2
12	Denmark	86.1
13	Venezuela	84.3
14	Netherlands	83.4
15	Norway	83.1
16	Greece	82.0[a]
17	Mauritius	80.1
18	Israel	79.0
19	Costa Rica	78.9[a]
20	Finland	78.2
21	Barbados	77.3
22	Jamaica	77.1
23	Portugal	76.8
24	Botswana	76.0
25	Ireland	74.2
26	United Kingdom	74.0
27	Spain	73.4
28	**Canada**	**73.0**

Table 3.7 (cont'd)
Turnout rates in Canada and 32 other democracies, 1980s

Rank		
29	Japan	71.4
30	India	62.0
31	Trinidad and Tobago	58.8
32	United States	54.3
33	Switzerland	47.5

Sources: Mackie and Rose (1982); *European Journal of Political Research*, *Electoral Studies*; *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments* Vols. 15–23.

Notes: Turnout based on registration figures, except for the United States (voting-age population).

ᵃCompulsory voting.

of such an increase in participation are quite apparent, especially from a rank-order perspective. A turnout rate of 85 percent for the 1980s would have lifted Canada from 13th position into 7th place among the 16 voluntary voting democracies (primary comparison countries in table 3.5), that is to say, into the top half of the list. For the widest comparison undertaken, based on the incorporation of countries in developing areas (table 3.7), the ranking would have changed even more dramatically: Canada would have been near the top third of the list of the 33 democracies.

Recommendation about the Turnout Problem in Canada

This failure of turnout constitutes a powerful additional argument for reforming the context of voting in Canada. In addition to welcoming reforms because of their inherent value – because they provide greater opportunities for citizens to participate in the most symbolic of all democratic activities – they can also be championed because of their potential to address the problem of turnout just underscored. Maximizing voting opportunities can thus serve many purposes. This should be borne in mind when considering that some reforms may be too expensive to implement. Augmented turnout would enhance prestige abroad and bolster legitimacy at home. These reasons alone constitute strong arguments for pursuing reform.

It is recommended that analyses of the possibility of reforms in the voting context take seriously into account the need to address the problem of turnout in Canada.

Turnout Comparisons Based on the Voting-Age Population

How does Canada fare if one uses the turnout measure derived from voting-age population statistics? The new Canadian turnout figure is 67.6 percent, a diminution of over five percentage points from the registration-based figure, as table 3.8 shows. (For the sake of further comparisons, turnout averages based on the registration measure have been brought forward from an earlier table.) This drop is paralleled by a lower ranking. Canada drops one additional place, into 17th

Table 3.8
Alternative measures of turnout rates in Canada and 18 other democracies, 1980s

	Measure of 1980s turnout based on			
Rank	Registration		Voting-age population	
1	Australia	94.3[a]	Italy	92.9[a]
2	Belgium	93.8[a]	Austria	89.1
3	Austria	91.5	Belgium	86.7[a]
4	New Zealand	90.5	Sweden	85.5
5	Italy	89.8[a]	Netherlands	85.2
6	Sweden	89.1	New Zealand	84.9
7	Germany	87.3	Denmark	84.1
8	France	86.2	Australia	83.4[a]
9	Denmark	86.1	Norway	82.3
10	Netherlands	83.4	Germany	82.2
11	Norway	83.1	Israel	81.3
12	Israel	79.0	Finland	78.9
13	Finland	78.2	Ireland	76.8
14	Ireland	74.2	France	74.6
15	United Kingdom	74.0	United Kingdom	73.7
16	**Canada**	**73.0**	Japan	71.2
17	Japan	71.4	**Canada**	**67.6**
18	United States	52.0	United States	52.0
19	Switzerland	47.5	Switzerland	39.7

Sources: For registration-based turnout sources, see Appendix B; age-eligible population calculated from United Nations *Demographic Yearbooks*.

[a] Compulsory voting.

spot, now also behind Japan. Only the United States and Switzerland have lower levels of voting.

It is apparent, however, that a change in positions is characteristic not only of the Canadian case. In fact, turnout levels in many countries differ considerably across the two measures, altogether changing the two sets of rankings in a fairly significant way. Two important factors account for this disparity, both of which have been alluded to earlier. First of all, the voting-age population data presented in table 3.8 are typical in that they do not take into account the existence of individuals in the population who are not citizens. Thus, actual levels of turnout in countries that have large immigrant populations, such as Australia, France, United States, Switzerland and Canada, are underestimated because ineligible individuals – people who could not possibly vote – are counted in the denominator. A second factor that can account for this disparity is the completeness of the registration process.

Completeness of the Registration Process

Two countries with the same age- and citizenship-eligible population size can achieve quite different participation levels if one is able to mount a more inclusive registration effort that ends up capturing all who are eligible to vote. This begs the question about the completeness of the Canadian registration effort. Canada's registration system is similar to the registration process in most other democracies in that the state takes the initiative in compiling the electors' lists. However, it is quite unique among democracies with regard to the way the compilation is accomplished, namely, on the basis of a door-to-door enumeration, undertaken each time an election is called. That this approach leads to an up-to-date registry, capturing all who are eligible for the upcoming election, is one of the principal claims made on its behalf. Presumably, this means that the lists include all those who are eligible for the upcoming election but excludes the names of those who have died or have moved out of the country and the like.

The claim made for completeness of coverage in the Canadian system appears to be a strong one. Boyer states that "approximately 98 percent of all eligible voters are registered, and therefore there is virtually no disfranchisement as a result of administrative procedure" (1987, 1:426). A similar figure is offered by the white paper, in part to justify its recommendation that the current system not be replaced (Canada, Privy Council Office 1986, 39). However, in neither case is there any reference to any available statistics that a reader might consult to verify such a claim. It is particularly odd that those who discuss different types of registration systems, such as Boyer and the authors of the white paper, do not bring comparative data systematically to bear.

It is, in any event, not certain that only 2 percent are missed in the registration process. There may be some evidence to suggest that the true percentage is a bit higher. A measure of the completeness of the registration effort in Canada and the regular group of 18 democracies can be seen in table 3.9. The data are 1980s decade averages based on (for each election) the number registered divided by the number in the population who are age-eligible. As can be seen in table 3.9, Canada does not fare well at all.

Only 92.2 percent, on average, of the age-eligible were enumerated. However, this does not take into account those within the population who are not citizens. A special effort was made to collect population data that took this into account. This was not always possible for each country and, in any event, it must be borne in mind that the entire exercise required drawing some overly simplified assumptions about data patterns and deriving estimations that are rougher than one would like. Caution is especially called for in comparisons involving small percentage differences. Nevertheless, it is still instructive to carry out the comparison.

Deriving an adjusted decade average figure for the Canadian case actually turned out to be quite complicated; the available information does provide, however, for the possibility of a reasonably close examination of the 1988 election. The unadjusted figure, 92.4 percent, is close to the decade average and is derived from a numerator (the number registered) of 17 639 001 and a denominator (the age-eligible) of 19 093 419. The latter figure was extrapolated from the closest available census, the mid-decade 1986 tally.

That census, along with some other sources, provided some information that was used to make the adjustment for non-citizens.[12] This leads to a revised estimate of the denominator, the age- and citizenship-eligible, of about 18 189 610, and, in turn, a revised estimate of the registration effort: 97.0 percent. This is a far cry from the initial figure of 92.4 percent and, by itself, represents a large enough difference to underscore the need to adjust the age population figures.

On the other hand, some might regard this figure as close enough to the figure of 98 percent often used in defence of the current enumeration system. Indeed, the process used to generate the 97 percent figure is rough enough that it is not possible to claim that the derived figure is more reliable than the 98 percent "estimate." At the same time, however, alternative assumptions and estimates could produce a figure lower than 97 percent.

Table 3.9
Average registration coverage in Canada and 18 other democracies, 1980s

	Average registered as percentage of	
	Age-eligible	Age- and citizenship-eligible
Canada	**92.2**	**97.0**[a]
Australia	88.4	n.a.
Austria	97.3	n.a.
Belgium	92.4	100+
Denmark	97.8	100.0
Finland	99.7	100.0
France	89.3	n.a.
Germany	94.4	100+
Ireland	100+	–
Israel	100+	–
Italy	100+	–
Japan	100.0	–
Netherlands	97.8	100+
New Zealand	93.8	n.a.
Norway	99.1	100+
Sweden	96.0	100+
Switzerland	83.6	98.0
United Kingdom	99.4	100+
United States	61.0[b]	approx. +2%[c]

Sources: United Nations *Demographic Yearbooks*; Eurostats; European Community Demographic Statistics; Yearbooks of Nordic Statistics; Yearbook of Northern Statistics; plus various country-specific yearbooks.

[a] For 1988 election; see text.

[b] For presidential elections 1972–80, from Powell (1984).

[c] For 1970s, from Powell (1986).

n.a. = not available.

In any event, it is clear that Canada's registration effort does not achieve complete coverage, a shortcoming that is made more evident by the performance of most other democracies, which, as seen in table 3.9, appear to achieve 100 percent registration coverage. The claim that the Canadian system leads to a more complete enumeration than most other systems does not appear to be true. Indeed, if anything, the comparative data point to the need to reform the system to ensure that more Canadians are not administratively disfranchised.

But even without recourse to the comparative record, there is an argument to be made for reform on the basis of the absolute numbers of Canadians involved. If the true coverage rate is 98 percent, then this means that an estimated 363 000 eligible electors were administratively disfranchised in the 1988 election; if the figure is 97 percent, well over a half million people (about 545 000) lost their right to vote. Either way, this is too large a chunk of the population to be able to claim that changes to the present system are not warranted.

There is finally another argument to note that points to the need for reform. Those who are missed in the enumeration process are probably concentrated in certain categories. They are likely to be in urban centres, particularly in the poorer districts of those centres, where enumerators may be more reluctant to conduct a full canvass. They are also likely to be members of minority groups who, while having become citizens, may be missed because of language and cultural barriers. Other groups might include the elderly and sick. The point is that the current registration is not only incomplete, but probably biased as well, contributing to the inequality of participation noted in the introduction. Though it is recognized that such individuals (if registered) may have a lower probability of voting to begin with, the fact that they have not been registered reduces that probability to zero.

There does, therefore, appear to be a plausible case for recommending some changes to the current system. However, the question is a complicated one and should be guided by what is not undertaken here, a careful discussion of the merits and demerits of alternative enumeration systems. These include the question of costs, one of the reasons that the white paper gave for maintaining the current system. The present study does not engage in this debate in direct terms but offers a general argument about the wisdom for reform. If, in fact, the current system is maintained, at the very least some thought will have to be given to ensure that the enumeration process does achieve a better coverage rate. Solutions could include recruiting more motivated and skilled enumerators, using different canvassing strategies, making more call-backs and the like.

However, it is recognized that there will be practical upper limits on what any refinements to the present system can achieve or indeed what alternative systems might deliver. (Alternatives may also not achieve complete coverage unless registration is made compulsory or, generally, strong incentives are provided – registration features that are unlikely to go over well with much of the Canadian public.)

In short, it is quite likely that there will be many individuals who are missed in the enumeration process (and, in terms of the current system, who also, for a variety of reasons, do not avail themselves of revision opportunities). To catch these individuals, this study advocates allowing for registration on voting day. In addition to the appeal to fairness, namely, that all citizens should be registered, there is the very important additional advantage that permitting late registration might help with the problem of a low turnout rate in Canada. This possibility is very strongly suggested in Wolfinger and Rosenstone's *Who Votes?* (1980). Capitalizing on the wide variation in registration laws in the different states in the United States, the two authors are able to estimate the impact of these registration variations on turnout (or what the effect on turnout would be with across-the-board changes).

The strongest impact on turnout is, indeed, the closing date of registration. Of the legal changes considered here, the one that would have the greatest impact on turnout would be the elimination of the closing date. An early closing date decreases the probability of voting. If one could register until election day itself, when media coverage is widest and interest is greatest, turnout would increase by about 6.1 percentage points. This change would have meant an additional 8 million voters in 1972 (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 77–78). (Three other features of state registration laws were found to have a statistically significant impact on turnout: allowing for absentee registration would increase turnout by 0.5 percent; permitting registration at any time during the work week would augment turnout by 0.4 percent; and permitting it during the evenings and on Saturdays would raise turnout by 2.5 percent.) Of course, results of this magnitude would probably not be realized in the Canadian context. After all, U.S. registration levels are so low that the situation is easily improved upon; moreover, individual initiative still defines the U.S. registration effort. This said, these results at least speak to the general lesson that participation does increase with more permissive registration arrangements – especially voting-day registration – and thus represent an important additional claim on behalf of this reform in the Canadian context.

Wolfinger and Rosenstone's data also provide the basis for making a claim on behalf of voting-day registration that is connected to the important concern of participation equality. Voting-day registration leads to a reduction in the turnout gap between the "better off" and "worse off." The authors show quite clearly that in the U.S. case at least, turnout increases most in response to this permissive registration arrangement among the least educated and drops off, virtually in monotonic fashion, in the higher education categories. For example, among those with four years or less of education, turnout increases a substantial 8.2 percent with late registration as a possibility; at the other extreme, among those with five years or more of college, turnout increases by only 1.9 percent (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, table 4.2). (The same is true of the other three registration features. In fact, if all four changes were implemented, turnout among the least educated would rise by 13.2 percentage points, and by 2.8 points among the best educated.) Once again, what is important to stress is the pattern of results observed; it is probably not the case that turnout levels among the least educated in Canada would increase as much as this, but there is reason to believe they would still rise noticeably. This represents a powerful argument for voting-day registration.

Perhaps the biggest argument against voting-day registration is the possibility that many Canadians might not bother with the regular registration process, including opportunities for the revision, if they knew they could register on voting day. Moreover, if large numbers did so, then there would be a risk that the polling stations would be clogged with people trying to vote, on the one hand, and those seeking both to register and to vote, on the other. These are legitimate concerns, but they could be handled by providing mild disincentives for voting-day registration. Individuals seeking to register on election day could, for example, be asked to have a registered elector in the district vouch for them, a practice currently allowed in rural areas, and/or be asked to sign a declaration of eligibility. It also seems fair to have separate line-ups for those who are just voting and those who are both registering and voting. This would act as a further small disincentive for those who might otherwise wait, for frivolous reasons, to register late.

Ensuring that late registration is used predominantly by those who were missed in the initial canvass and were unable to avail themselves of the revision process would also be in the interests of the political parties. Presumably, the parties would like to have lists of electors as complete and as early as possible and would not want to have a wide-open system of voting-day registration. This would reinforce the need for some screening (disincentives) on election day. However, the key point remains that individuals who were not registered but who wanted to vote could have the opportunity to do so for the price of a little inconvenience.

It is therefore recommended that registration on voting day be permitted, within a framework that does not undermine the ordinary registration process and yet provides additional opportunities to those missed by that process.

Summary of Recommendations

It is recommended that analyses of the possibility of reforms in the voting context take seriously into account the need to address the problem of turnout in Canada.

It is recommended that registration on voting day be permitted, within a framework that does not undermine the ordinary registration process and yet provides additional opportunities to those missed by that process.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Arguments about reforming the voting context are made more credible because turnout is greatly determined by the nature of institutional forces within that context. In this section, the analysis of the impact of institutions centres on "larger" institutional factors that have been identified as having a possible bearing on voter turnout. These include aspects and effects of the electoral system (e.g., the electoral formula, vote–seat disparities), the existence and strength of an upper house, and whether the system is federal or not. Even though these macro-level features might be seen as being outside of the Commission's mandate or implying alterations that cannot be realistically brought about as part of a process of reform, it is still advisable to consider their relevance, and for two interrelated reasons. First, their treatment will round out the analysis of the institutional environment and its effect on voting, thus adding a degree of completeness to the current attempt at understanding the general nature of the relationship between the institutional setting and turnout. Part of that understanding, and this is the second justification, centres on the implications that these systemic factors hold for the kinds of reforms discussed in the next section. It turns out that in the Canadian case, the forces associated with these factors operate largely to disadvantage turnout. This strengthens the argument for pressing ahead with the kinds of reforms urged in the following section – reforms that are within the Commission's mandate and that can, indeed, be implemented.

The intention here is first to review, in selected fashion, some of the major studies that deal with the macro-institutional variables. Particular attention is paid to those relatively few empirically oriented studies that have taken a cross-national approach. A second task is to contribute to that literature by using the 1980s comparative turnout data, referenced throughout this study, to generate some additional and original empirical analysis.

A Selected Literature Review

The review begins with a consideration of the electoral system context, the most complicated of the institutionally based forces. As will be seen, the complexity results from the potential impact on turnout of not only electoral system attributes, but also effects (e.g., disproportionality) deriving from those attributes.

The Electoral System

Powell summarizes three arguments explaining why single-member district systems might generate less turnout than proportional representation (PR) systems:

> (1) with single-member districts, it is likely that some districts will be noncompetitive, giving citizens less incentive to vote; parties, less incentive to campaign there; (2) the single-member district system of representation can lead to great distortion between votes given to a party and the legislative representation it receives … these distortions may alienate and discourage sympathizers of disadvantaged parties; (3) single-member districts may encourage the formation of more diffusely based political parties, whose ability to mobilize easily identifiable demographic groups of supporters, especially social class groups, will be inhibited. (1980, 12)

Another argument bears upon the connection between PR and multipartyism: the greater number of parties engendered by PR provides a larger range of choice for citizens, subsequently leading more of them to cast ballots (Blais and Carty 1990, 167).

There are, however, countervailing arguments suggesting that participation might actually be higher in plurality systems. (For the case about majority systems, see Blais and Carty 1990.) The greater ease with which constituents may identify with their individual representatives may stimulate the sense of "personal linkages to the national centres of power" (Powell 1980, 12). Powell also notes that plurality systems may benefit turnout because they involve, unlike some PR systems, simple choice situations (ibid.). This is related to the argument that plurality systems might also augment turnout because they are associated with a more direct linkage between voting and the key outcome – the formation of the government. The one-party majorities that are more likely in plurality-governed contests (Blais and Carty 1987) do, indeed, mean that a more decisive outcome is probable. By contrast, in PR systems, the attendant proliferation of parties may mean that government formation occurs, some time after the election, as the result of bargaining among subsets of parties in the newly constituted legislature. This process is at a considerable remove from the decisiveness of the election result that typically occurs in plurality settings (Downs 1957, 155–56; Jackman 1987, 408). As Jackman summarizes: "Where elections are less important, citizens have less incentive to vote. Multipartyism should therefore depress turnout" (1987, 408).

Unfortunately, the empirical literature does not point unambiguously to the ascendancy of one perspective over another. As will be pointed out, part of the problem may stem from the fact that different authors use alternative operationalizations of key variables, and it is not always clear which particular procedure is the superior one. Nevertheless, a careful consideration of all of the evidence does seem to suggest more support for the idea that turnout is higher in proportional systems; this includes the modest empirical contribution made here.

Powell, in his (1980) study of 30 democracies, including developing-area democracies, finds that average turnout (for the period 1960–78) is higher among those countries with PR, but that the relationship nearly disappears when compulsory voting and facilitative registration are controlled. However, if there is no direct impact on turnout associated with PR systems, there is evidence that PR makes a difference in an indirect way by increasing the linkage between national parties and social groups. In turn, this latter variable constitutes an important explanation of turnout and is premised on the notion that "where the national parties represent different, meaningful, cleavage groups, the electoral outcomes take on an easily identifiable significance. Where these linkages are relatively stable, they provide cues to even poorly informed and less interested voters as to the interpretation of issue and candidate choices in given elections" (ibid., 13). With "linkage" as the dependent variable, the beta for a dummy variable representation of PR is a statistically significant .38.[13]

An additional study by Powell (1986) is also relevant, in part because he restricts his focus to the industrial democracies. His analysis includes average turnout in two decades, the 1960s and 1970s, as separate dependent variables. However, this time he does not explicitly set up the electoral formulae as independent variables. Rather, he captures some of the attributes of the electoral system in his measure of "nationally competitive election districts." This item taps the breadth of the competitive structure associated with the electoral system, with the rationale that "electoral constituencies help determine whether parties and voters have equal incentive to get voters to the polls in all parts of the country, or whether there may be reason to neglect less evenly balanced regions in turning out the vote" (Powell 1986, 21). Scores range from four to one. The top score of four is given to countries with a system of national proportional representation or a national pool for some legislative seats or a simple national presidential vote; a score of three is given to PR systems with more than five members per district; a score of two is given to PR systems with three to five members; and a score of one is given to single-member or winner-take-all districts (ibid., Appendix A). Powell carries out a regression analysis (for voluntary voting countries only) and finds that for both decade periods, the national competitive election districts measure is an important predictor of turnout, with betas of .41 and .33 (ibid., 25).

This second study by Powell offers additional, but indirect, evidence of the importance of PR as an enhancer of voting. It is indirect because different facets of the electoral system have been worked into the operationalization, including, as Blais and Carty (1990) emphasize, district magnitude, which by itself has been found to have a strong bearing upon vote–seat distortion (see Lijphart 1990; Rae 1969; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). In turn, electoral disproportionality – the extent to which votes are not translated into legislative seats – has been found to be associated with turnout. Jackman, for instance, works it into his own analysis of turnout in the same 19 countries of primary interest here, on the assumption that lower turnout will result because vote–seat inequity "introduces a strong disincentive to potential minor-party voters' casting a ballot" (1987, 408). For average turnout in both the 1960s and 1970s, he finds that disproportionality has a statistically significant negative impact on voting. The fact that disproportionality is fairly strongly associated with single-member systems suggests, again, evidence for the general proposition that turnout is lower in such systems.

Jackman (1987) uses regression analysis for his empirical work, and the equations also include Powell's national competitive districts measure, as well as a variable tapping the degree of multipartyism within the system (along with dummy variables for Switzerland, the United States and compulsory voting countries, and a measure of unicameralism, discussed below). Jackman (ibid., 420–21) finds, as did Powell, a positive (and statistically significant) impact associated with competitive districts. In part, this is not surprising, given that Jackman uses the very same measure and goes to great lengths to point out how his turnout scores bear a close resemblance to Powell's. Jackman does not explicitly test for the impact of the electoral formula, but it is clear that the national competitive districts measure is strongly correlated with the electoral formula. The correlation is not reported in his study, but a calculation from his data, using a simple dummy variable

(PR system, yes versus no) yields a substantial correlation of .73 with the competitive districts measure. Two interpretations are possible, but both underscore the importance of PR in interpreting the relationship between competitive districts and turnout. One interpretation is that the national competitive districts measure comes quite close to being interchangeable as a measure of the electoral formula itself. A second, and from the point of view of Jackman's argument, more charitable, alternative concedes that the competitive districts measure is more proximate to turnout, but that the influence of the formula, even as an antecedent variable, is quite strong.

The multipartyism variable acts as Jackman expects; participation does appear to be lower where there is a proliferation of parties. Does this suggest that PR has a negative (and indirect) effect on turnout because it increases the number of parties within the system? Not necessarily. Lijphart's recent analysis shows that the electoral system's influence on multipartyism is not strong, unlike the case for disproportionality. Moreover, for Lijphart, disproportionality is the logical link between the electoral system and multipartyism – "the more proportional the electoral system is, the more favorable it is for small and new parties" (1990, 488) – but disproportionality is only a modest predictor of multipartyism. This is perhaps not so surprising, given that a whole range of factors (including, significantly, the nature of societal cleavages) can exert an independent effect on multipartyism.

Some of the difficulties with the work of Powell and Jackman, according to Blais and Carty, stem from the formers' confounding of electoral system properties with the different effects of those properties. Importantly, Blais and Carty complain that the nationally competitive districts measure "confounds the effects of the electoral formulae with those of district magnitude," making it difficult "to estimate in a straightforward fashion the precise impact of electoral system variables" (1990, 168). A more general criticism centres on the failure to "distinguish between the role of formal institutions (like the electoral system) *per se* and that of intervening variables which depend to a considerable degree on those very institutions ... Disproportionality and multipartyism both influence turnout. Yet those two variables are not really institutions; they are, in part, consequences of electoral systems which themselves have an effect on turnout" (ibid.).

In their own empirical analysis, Blais and Carty keep the formula variables (measures of PR, plurality and majority systems) separate from those that are supposed to represent derivative effects or consequences of the formula – competitiveness, electoral disproportionality and the number of parties.

These two authors also take a different line with regard to the range of elections studied and the nature of the dependent variable. Unlike Jackman and Powell, who rely upon decade-based turnout averages, Blais and Carty count, as a datum point, each election held in the various countries they include. In particular, they examine 509 elections in 20 countries (excluding the United States, but including Iceland and Luxembourg) covering almost a century and a half. The earliest election is Belgium's 1847 contest; the most recent ones were held as late as 1985. Blais and Carty also take a distinctive step in using the registration-based measure as their dependent variable.

The different analytical procedures followed by the pair are reflected in results that are somewhat at variance with what Jackman finds. First of all, they uncover no evidence for the importance of disproportionality in lowering turnout throughout the entire time period. (They do, however, achieve a statistically significant result when they restrict the analysis to the elections held after the Second World War. This leads them to suggest that Jackman's finding is time bound [Blais and Carty 1990, 177–78].) With regard to the other "intervening variables" – multipartyism and competitiveness – they do obtain statistically significant coefficients. The number of parties is, as Jackman demonstrates, a factor that reduces turnout. However, the effect is quite small. The same is true of the competitiveness measure. While it registers a statistically significant effect – more competitiveness does heighten turnout – the "impact is very weak and non-linear" (Blais and Carty 1990, 178).

However, in spite of this mix of weak findings for what are argued to be consequences of the electoral system, Blais and Carty find that the formulae by themselves exert a marked and statistically significant impact on participation. With PR as the reference category, they report coefficients of –5.7 and –11.2 for the dummy variables representing majority and plurality systems, respectively. In other words, PR systems appear to generate 11 percent more turnout than single-member plurality systems and nearly 6 percent more than majority systems. The authors find this pattern of results both comforting and puzzling: "It is comforting that we have been able to establish the validity of arguments in the literature that electoral systems make a difference, and more particularly that PR increases participation. The puzzle is that the factors usually adduced as responsible for this greater participation under PR do not seem to operate as expected" (Blais and Carty 1990, 179).

They resolve the conundrum by taking the data at face value and by suggesting that PR has, indeed, a direct impact of sorts on voting. "It may be that what encourages electoral participation is not the degree of disproportionality but the mere fact that voters have an electoral procedure that assures some proportionality between votes and seats ... it is the 'symbolic effects' of electoral systems rather than either their consequences for seat-vote relationships or the number of parties, that matter to potential voters. PR does foster higher turnout" (Blais and Carty 1990, 179).

However valid the particular interpretation may be about how PR exerts its direct effect, at the very least the Blais and Carty effort can be added to the list of studies showing that a connection does exist between PR and increased participation.

Unicameralism and Bicameralism

In arguing that multipartyism depresses turnout, Jackman (1987) emphasizes that elections in such systems are less decisive for the key outcome – the formation of government. The author goes on to argue that the decisiveness of the resulting government, formed in the lower house, is also pertinent. Where there exists a rival chamber, especially if it is an influential body, elections to the first chamber are less consequential. Jackman writes: "the degree to which the first legislative body is constrained or checked ... is the relevant quantity. Where there is no second house (as in New Zealand), governments based on the first house do not have to compete and compromise with another legislative chamber. In contrast, where there is strong bicameralism (as in West Germany and Switzerland), legislation can only be produced by compromise between members of the two houses" (1987, 408).

Unicameralism should therefore foster turnout, while bicameralism, especially "strong bicameralism" should diminish turnout. The latter term derives from Lijphart, who offers a typology for scoring unicameralism–bicameralism variations. The typology employs two facets of the relationship between first and second legislatures, their symmetry and congruency. The former dimension refers to the relative political importance of the second chamber (based on its formal constitutional powers and method of selection) – the more asymmetric, the stronger the lower house – while the second dimension encompasses the extent to which the two bodies differ from each other in composition – the more congruent, the stronger the lower house (1984, chap. 6). Jackman (1987) borrows the logic of Lijphart's scoring system, which is derived from this typology. A score of four is given to unicameral democracies; a score of three is given to congruent and extremely asymmetrical bicameral systems; a score of two is given to incongruent and extremely asymmetrical bicameralism; a score of one is given to congruent and symmetrical (or moderately symmetrical) bicameralism; and a score of zero is given to strong bicameralism (Lijphart 1984, 212–13; Jackman 1987, 410).

Jackman's data sustain his hypothesis. For both the 1960s and 1970s turnout tests, coefficients bear, as expected, positive signs and are statistically significant. In the former case, the slope is 2.69; in the latter, 1.69. Evaluating the 1970s-linked coefficient in terms of the categories of the independent variables means, for example, that "unicameral legislatures in countries like Finland and Norway [produce] a turnout increase of about 8 points over the rate that prevails with strong bicameralism (as in Australia and West Germany)" (Jackman 1987, 414–15).

Blais and Carty (1990) also examine the impact of unicameralism on turnout. Over the entire range of the 509 elections they examine, they find no evidence of a relationship, but they do allude to a statistically significant result – a positive coefficient – when they restrict their analysis to the period after the Second World War. However, their measure of unicameralism is cruder than the Lijphart-based item Jackman uses; indeed, it only differentiates between single- and dual-chamber systems. At the same time, the fact that their rough measure is still associated with turnout differences in more recent times perhaps corroborates the notion that unicameralism–bicameralism differences do influence turnout levels.

Federalism

While federal systems are more likely to have upper chambers, these chambers are not exclusive to federal regimes. It would appear that only Blais and Carty have considered the impact of federalism on turnout. They suggest two reasons why federal institutions might be associated with less turnout, the first of which is an extension of the familiar argument about decisiveness: "in such systems the national legislative assembly has less power than do those in unitary systems since authority is divided and shared with provincial or state legislative assemblies. National elections in a federal country are therefore less decisive for the very same reason that they may be less decisive in a bicameral system and we expect turnout to be generally lower in less decisive contexts" (1990, 171).

The second reason for such a negative relationship is not developed but is simply attributed to a reference by Crewe (1981) that more frequent elections, as do occur in federal states, may depress turnout.

Blais and Carty use a dummy variable to capture this institutional feature, but it appears to be unrelated to turnout. They explicitly mention that it has no effect across the entire range of elections they examine and make no reference to it when they mention the results they get for the subset of post-war elections. Presumably, this means the federalism variable fails to be relevant in this more circumscribed context as well.

Some Additional Empirical Analysis

These institutional factors become the object of some additional data analysis undertaken here. While the rationale is obviously to offer further evidence of the impact of these factors – which is especially welcomed in the case of federalism (which only Blais and Carty consider) – a more specific advantage is obtained because the methodology employed here differs somewhat from the practices followed in the studies just reviewed. This broadens the context for reaching summary assessments about the impact of such institutional variables. What may be of additional interest, however, is whether or not the new analysis leads to similar patterns uncovered by others. Any convergence in results in spite of procedural differences could be taken to imply stronger corroboration for the effects under consideration.

Here the registration version of the dependent variable is used, based on average participation for the 1980s. This is the same version used by Blais and Carty, while Jackman used the age-eligible-based indicator. This might account for some of the differences between the two sets of results. In fact, the registration-based measure may be the preferred alternative because its employment naturally controls for variations in the enumeration effort, which, as has been seen, do characterize the cross-national picture to some extent. If such variation is not subject to the same institutional forces that provide the incentives to vote, then the institutional–turnout relationship may well be estimated incorrectly. Simply put, the incentives to vote associated with some institutional factors cannot motivate non-citizens among the age-eligible, who do not have the right to vote in the first place. This may mean that institutional–turnout relationships are constrained when the age-eligible measure is used. In any event, the "anomalous" U.S. case, largely because of the registration issue, is put to the side in the present case, as was done in the Blais and Carty effort.[14]

The present analysis also differs from the latter inquiry by using averaged turnout scores. Blais and Carty take as a separate datum point each election held in the 20 countries they examine. While this approach gives them a large database providing many degrees of freedom and the supposed claim of generality, it also creates two fairly significant problems. First of all, it means that the analysis suffers from the vagaries brought on by an inability to control for interelection sources of variation. Nowhere do the pair take into account the sorts of effects associated with leadership, issues, the weather, the accuracy of the register, to name but a few factors that operate to push turnout up or down a few extra percentage points in any given election. The avoidance of such election-specific fluctuations constitutes one of the principal reasons for the decision, taken in the present analysis, to rely on decade averages.

Second, their methodology involves an undesirable weighting of the evidence. The point that Lijphart (1990) makes in critiquing Rae's analysis, which, itself, relies upon individual election data, is relevant for consideration here: "elections under the same rules are not really independent cases but merely repeated operations of the same electoral system" (Rae 1969, 482). In other words, simply because some countries happen to have more elections during a given period of time in which the prevailing macro-institutional arrangements are fixed is no reason to allow them to contribute disproportionately to the determination of the relationships that emerge. In point of fact, the number of elections that a country has is usually unrelated to the nature of those arrangements. Exactly how the Blais and Carty results might suffer from this problem of weighting is not immediately clear, nor is it evident how they might be influenced by interelection sources of variation. It is possible that the effects are minor, but it is also possible that some of the unique findings that emerge in their analysis have their origin in these effects.

Jackman's analysis itself may be misleading, especially in terms of the generality it claims. After portraying the regression analysis results using the 1970s turnout data, Jackman successfully uses the 1960s as a test of replication. Yet the two datasets are so similar that this convergence of results is not terribly surprising. Three of his primary independent variables – nationally competitive districts, electoral disproportionality and multipartyism – have the exact same country scores for both decades (Jackman 1987, table 1). Moreover, for two others, unicameralism and compulsory voting, the scores are virtually identical across the two time periods. For unicameralism, only the values for Sweden involve a change, as that country did away with its upper chamber in 1970; that same year saw the elimination of compulsory voting in the Netherlands, the only alteration in scores for this measure. This stability in the predictor variables is matched by a strong consistency in the scores of the dependent variables for the two decades. A calculation of the turnout rates reported by Jackman yields a correlation very near unity, .94 (.95 if the Dutch case is put to the side). In short, Jackman's data in the two time periods are so similar, he virtually guarantees "successful" replication.

As for the independent variables referencing electoral system effects, the present analysis mimics the approach taken by Blais and Carty; that is, the analysis is configured in such a way as to gauge whether or not the electoral formula itself might be important, quite apart from accompanying effects (disproportionality, competitiveness and multipartyism). More specifically, this entails setting up dummy variables to differentiate among plurality, majority and PR systems. The present study also follows Blais and Carty's measurement of competitiveness (the gap between the two leading parties, alternatively represented, in votes and in seats – and averaged out for the various elections in the 1980s). Multipartyism is operationalized using the same formula that Jackman and Blais and Carty employ – Laasko and Taagepera's (1979) "effective number of parties."[15]

Disproportionality is measured here in the same way that Blais and Carty measure it, relying on Loosemore and Hanby's (1971) deviation index. Interestingly, Jackman uses Lijphart's (1984, 160–65) disproportionality measure, but Lijphart, himself, in his most recent analysis of electoral systems (1990), explicitly champions the Loosemore and Hanby instrument; others (Taagepera and Shugart 1989) also point to it as the best available measure of vote–seat disparities. Unfortunately, in the present analysis, the resulting measure is too highly correlated with the electoral formulae variables. It bears a correlation of –.88 with the PR dummy, .69 with the plurality measure and .40 with the majority dummy. These statistics are instructive in showing how strongly PR systems diminish vote–seat gap disparities, yet, at the same time, the relationships are too strong to allow a reliable differentiation between these effects. There is little choice but to present several regression models that alternatively employ the formulae and disproportion measures.

The remaining set of independent variables examined is common to all the models. The present analysis follows Jackman in using Lijphart's four-category variable to capture unicameralism–bicameralism variations and follows Blais and Carty by representing federalism as a dichotomous measure. Dummy variables are also used to represent compulsory voting and the unique Swiss case, a common practice most authors follow.

The results for a model that includes the formulae variables but not the "derivative" variables are portrayed in the first column of table 3.10. This six-variable model explains a respectable 80 percent of the variance in cross-national turnout in the 1980s. Not surprisingly, and consistent with what others have reported, compulsory voting has a strong positive effect on turnout. Participation is a little over 15 percentage points higher in those countries that compel their citizens to vote. The unique situation of the Swiss case is indicated by a very strong negative coefficient, indicating that, beyond the effects of the other variables in the equation, turnout is 36 percentage points lower in that country. There is also tentative support for the importance of unicameralism, found to be relevant in Jackman's analysis and in the Blais and Carty piece, at least when the latter restricted themselves to post-war elections. Here, too, unicameralism fosters participation, though the coefficient does not meet the test of statistical significance at conventional levels. Interestingly, the federalism variable is close to being statistically significant, but it bears a positive coefficient. Blais and Carty, having hypothesized a negative federalism–turnout connection in their

Table 3.10
Regression models of voter turnout and institutional characteristics for 18 other democracies, 1980s

Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Compulsory voting	15.33 (5.21/.013)	15.83 (5.55/.017)	16.19 (6.32/.031)	15.65 (4.59/.005)
Switzerland dummy	-35.78 (8.01/.001)	-31.60 (9.68/.009)	-33.69 (10.41/.010)	-32.33 (7.15/.001)
Unicameralism	1.89 (1.46/.223)	2.09 (1.44/.177)	1.76 (1.60/.299)	2.25 (1.32/.101)
Federalism	7.35 (4.12/.102)	5.12 (4.75/.306)	5.70 (5.18/.301)	6.75 (3.83/.103)
Plurality system	-4.80 (3.95/.249)	—	-4.69 (5.02/.376)	—
Majority system	-7.01 (5.32/.214)	—	-7.04 (6.41/.301)	—
Disproportionality	—	-0.43 (0.27/.141)	—	-0.45 (0.24/.082)
Competitiveness	—	-0.19 (0.22/.411)	-0.13 (0.26/.630)	—
Multipartyism	—	-0.64 (1.47/.680)	-0.80 (1.69/.645)	—
Constant	75.93	82.02	80.95	76.84
R^2	.80	.82	.81	.81
F-ratio	7.40	6.69	4.83	10.21
(N=18)				

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients; figures in parentheses are standard errors and statistical significance levels.

study, end up finding no relationship. The current result indicates that in federal systems turnout is almost seven and one-half percentage points higher than in unitary regimes.

The results in the first column are, however, in accord with what Blais and Carty report about the influence of the electoral formulae variables. Here, too, the two non-PR-system variables bear negative signs, indicating less turnout relative to PR. There are, however, two noticeable differences. First, Blais and Carty find that the lowest amount of turnout is associated with plurality systems, but here the lowest levels of turnout occur for majority systems. Participation in proportional systems is about seven points higher than in majority systems and about five points higher than in plurality systems. Second, the current results fail to achieve statistical significance (at least at conventional levels), so it can only be maintained that the current results lean toward supporting the importance of the formula and the general idea that more voting occurs in proportional systems.

The derivative electoral system variables for the two formulae variables are substituted in the second column of table 3.10. The amount of explained variance is nudged up very slightly in this second model to 82 percent. As well, there are some slight alterations that occur in connection with the other institutional variables. The federalism coefficient diminishes slightly but is clearly no longer statistically significant. The dummy variable for Switzerland drops a bit as well but remains substantial in magnitude. Of the three new variables, only disproportionality seems to make a difference. It has the anticipated negative sign, supporting the notion that vote–seat disparities do inhibit turnout. This squares with what Jackman, on the one hand, and Blais and Carty (for the post-war period), on the other hand, report and thus softens the concern that the coefficient falls slightly short of normally accepted levels of statistical significance. As for competitiveness, measured by the gap in votes between the two leading parties, the result is far off the mark, and indeed the coefficient is negligible (the measure based on the gap in seats fares even worse). Also negligible is the coefficient for multipartyism.

The performance of the competitiveness and multipartyism variables does not improve when a third model is brought to bear, which includes these two items, along with the two formulae measures (the third column of table 3.10). Variations in cross-national turnout do not appear to be associated with competitiveness and multipartyism, at least as they are operationalized in the present context. In fact, if these variables are dropped from consideration, then there are two representations that provide the most parsimonious multivariate explanations of turnout. One is given in the first column and the other, a new one, is portrayed in the fourth. The latter model works in the disproportionality measure, and, again, to avoid colinearity problems, without the formulae variables. Model four, with five variables, conserves the most degrees of freedom, and this may explain why the coefficients for all the variables are statistically significant or, if not, are very nearly so. The signs of the coefficients are consistent with the results in the other columns and, in particular, the coefficient for the federalism measure continues to be positive. In addition, disproportionality remains linked to turnout differences in a negative way.

In essence, then, the only result achieved in this analysis that was not anticipated, one way or another, by the literature is the one for federalism. Blais and Carty originally speculated about a negative relationship between federalism and turnout, on the assumption that the division of jurisdictional responsibilities in federal states means that elections at the centre are less decisive for the exercise of power.

To probe this angle a bit further, a new variable was created to tap the degree of power concentrated in the hands of the central government. This was done for both federal and unitary states. While more decentralization is expected in federal systems as a general rule, the rule cannot be overstated. Certainly this is the message received from the particular measure utilized, which comes straight from Lijphart's (1984) analysis, in which he operationalized centralization on the basis of the central government's share of tax revenue. Indeed, his data show that the national government in federal Australia has a larger share (80%) of tax revenue than do the central governments in unitary Denmark (71%), Finland (70%), Norway (70%), Japan (65%) and Sweden (62%); as well, Austria's national government claims as much tax revenue as does the Norwegian central government. Moreover, among unitary systems themselves, there is considerable variation in tax shares, ranging from the Netherlands with 98%, down through to the United Kingdom with 87% and, finally, to Sweden (Lijphart 1984, table 10.2). In any event, the logic of analysis about decisiveness should hold for unitary systems as well as for federal ones. In fact, the results (not shown) indicate that there is no relationship whatsoever between centralization and turnout. Moreover, introducing the tax share measure into the various regression equations did little to alter the effect that the federalism dummy variable had on turnout. It continued to demonstrate the same sorts of effects seen in table 3.10.

The other reason Blais and Carty offer for anticipating a negative relationship between federalism and turnout hinges on the simple notion that participation might be depressed when citizens have to vote often –

a sort of participation fatigue. On the other hand, the United States notwithstanding, perhaps citizens in most systems actually benefit from the educative and self-actualizating experience of political involvement and become even more prone to participate. Of course, there might well be other, unspecified facets of the federal condition that are, in effect, operative. Clearly, more research is suggested in this regard.

In sum, apart from the way the federalism variable works, the results generated here do, more or less, correspond to those reported by others. This is true even though the procedures followed differ in important ways from each of the main studies considered. Generally speaking, the negative impact of bicameralism is confirmed, as is the importance of the electoral system. The latter generalization, that the electoral system does account for variations in turnout, is sufficient for present purposes. At the same time, it is recognized that there is still ambiguity about the specific processes involved, including the relative impact of the formula as opposed to disproportionality, to which it is strongly linked.

The Implications for the Canadian Case

It is also clear that these macro-institutional effects help explain Canada's lower turnout rate. Most obviously, the fact that Canada does not require its citizenry to vote explains its lower rate relative to those countries that do. With regard to the electoral system, if the formula is singled out as the relevant explanatory factor, then it is clear that Canada's plurality system "penalizes" turnout relative to countries with PR. The same is true if the emphasis is put on the disproportionality that ensues from plurality. In Jackman's measure of seat–vote disparity, Canada (with a score of 8.1) ranks in second-to-last position, ahead of only France (12.3). Considering that the overall mean for the 19 countries analysed was 3.7, the Canadian figure is far from the cross-national norm (Jackman 1987, table 1). A different measure of disproportionality was used in the present analysis, but the picture that emerges is the same. For the countries considered here, the mean vote–seat gap is 8.5, while the disparity for Canada is about double, at 17.1.

What are the implications of this analysis for Canadian turnout? At a practical level, given that electoral system reform is not on the agenda, the most appropriate lesson may be the need to be forceful with the arguments made on behalf of reforming the voting environment in the manner to be discussed in the next section. If Canadian turnout already suffers because of the operation of the electoral system, and changes in this area are not going to be seriously contemplated, then the only alternative is for more "modest" reforms.

Second-chamber arrangements also work to Canada's disadvantage. But even among bicameral systems, turnout in the Canadian case – "weak bicameralism" – is less than in countries with "insignificant bicameralism." What is relevant in these days of speculation about constitutional reform options is the possibility that the direction of change might have a bearing on turnout. Indeed, those in favour of abolishing the Senate could point to the positive relationship between unicameralism and turnout as an additional argument on behalf of their aim, though it would surely remain as a secondary kind of argument. On the other hand, a dramatically strengthened upper house, a "Triple-E Senate," for example, raises the possibility of an additional depression in Canadian turnout; advocates of such a change might wish to support vote-facilitating reforms in defence of a strengthened upper house.

In the case of federalism, a positive relationship was found, suggesting an advantage for Canada. However, the result needs to be followed up with more tests, especially given the disparity between the current (not always statistically significant) results, and those reported by Blais and Carty. And, in any event, there is still a need to spell out with greater precision the theoretical underpinnings of any possible connection. At present, the federalism–participation relationship is best thought of in tentative terms, and it is too early to tell if it represents a true institutional counterweight to the negative operation of other institutional features.

That relationship might also be considered to be a tentative one, pending more analysis involving centralization–decentralization issues. While it is instructive that the Lijphart tax share measure bears no relation to turnout, this may not necessarily be the plight of other indicators. Moreover, the case of Switzerland provides some sense that this still represents a profitable line of inquiry. Indeed, one reason why Switzerland is especially represented in the multivariate analysis (by a dummy variable) is to acknowledge the fact that "most important policy decisions are made at the Cantonal level" (Powell 1980, 20).[16] To the extent that this particular facet of the Swiss experience represents a major contributing reason for the country's very low turnout rate, the message for the Canadian case may not be heartening after all. The current debate about redistributing powers within the federation, which has been renewed in the wake of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, may have a bearing on the nature of participation in national elections. If the Swiss case presents any kind of lesson, then the concern is that further "decentralization" may lead to less turnout in those elections. This may constitute yet another justification for pushing hard for vote-facilitating reforms.

Conclusion

This section has focused on those facets of the institutional setting that are not of direct interest to the Commission. However, it was deemed worthwhile to explore the impact that these macro-institutions have on voting in order to gain as global an understanding as possible. More instrumentally, a consideration of the electoral system, unicameralism–bicameralism variations and federal versus unitary structures helped to provide a backdrop for understanding the importance of the vote-facilitating reforms to be discussed in the next section.

That understanding amplifies the importance of reform in a general way. Turnout in Canada is currently "disadvantaged" because of the plurality system and the existence of the Senate. This seems fairly certain. Vote-facilitating reforms, which can be recommended by the Commission, should be thought of as being even more necessary, in order to provide more balance – more advantages – to the voting environment.

Less certain is whether the federal structure operates to offset these disadvantages. What is also uncertain is whether the further decentralization that is being debated might undo whatever positive effects are associated with federalism. The case of Switzerland, with the lowest turnout and the most decentralized federal structure among all democracies, was mentioned in this regard. The fear, to reiterate, is that turnout in general elections in Canada might decline as a result of the granting of more powers to the provinces. So, too, might strengthening the upper house lead to lower turnout. The prospect of an even worse turnout record in the future, as a result of contemplated constitutional changes, also underscores the need for reforming the voting context.

REFORMING THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGAL CONTEXT OF VOTING

The purpose of this section is to situate the macro-institutional voting environment of Canada within the larger democratic context. In broad terms, this involves comparing the legal and administrative conditions that facilitate (or restrict) the vote in Canada with those that are found in the democracies forming the principal basis of comparison. Because the situation in Canada has not been static – there have been many suggested areas of change – the comparative treatment deals not only with the practices that are currently in place, but also with those that have been contemplated and put forward in major reform efforts, particularly in the June 1986 White Paper on Election Law Reform and in Bill C-79.

Explicit comparisons with other democracies are pertinent because the extent to which particular vote-facilitating measures have been widely adopted (or perhaps abandoned) in other countries can help inform decisions about the direction of reform in Canada. The knowledge that particular provisions for vote facilitation are well established in other countries may help to rally additional support for those changes. On the other hand, a sense that few countries have adopted a particular process may suggest some caution or at least the need for further reflection. At the same time, it is necessary to maintain some sensitivity to the particular context of reform. Progressive steps that would better enable the sick and aged to vote in Canada do not necessarily have to be sustained by the experience of other countries; indeed, in some instances, the fact that Canada might be in the forefront of change with particular reform proposals can be used as a powerful argument about immediately proceeding with those changes.

A comparative analysis will also be valuable if it can provide an understanding about whether or not some changes have the potential to deal with the problem of low turnout in Canada. Evidence suggesting that a particular voting procedure increases turnout by a noticeable amount would be especially important to marshal, and presumably would strengthen, the argument for the procedure's adoption. It would also be important to try to determine if the increased turnout could be generated at all levels of the population, even among individuals who are less well off and normally have a much lower a priori probability of voting. A concern with turnout equality, it should be re-emphasized, is one of the hallmarks of the present study.

Unfortunately, borrowing lessons from other countries about the relationship between the number of citizens who use a particular voting format and overall turnout is not a straightforward matter. While there is always the possibility that some procedures are culturally bound and may not work as intended in other polities, a more concrete problem centres on the uncertainty about whether or not individuals who vote in an alternative manner, for example, in advance polls, do so only as a matter of convenience or simply because they would otherwise forgo exercising their franchise. If, in fact, the answer is the former, and there is the likelihood that these individuals would have voted in any event on ordinary polling day, then the impact on turnout associated with the use of advance polls would be small. Since it is virtually impossible to know the "conditional behaviour" of electors, it is difficult to get a precise reading on the relationship between the specific voting format and enhanced turnout.

This point is particularly germane for this study because it does rely so heavily on country-specific case evidence that, admittedly, does suffer from this limitation. For example, the observation that 10 percent of a country's citizenry votes in advance polls would be cited as some indication that the availability of such a voting alternative contributes to higher levels of aggregate turnout. But by no means can it be concluded, with any certainty, that the contribution is 10 percent.

At the same time, this does not mean that the most limiting situation necessarily applies, that is, that the contribution is 0 percent (i.e., what the impact on turnout would be if it were true that all who made use of the alternative would have voted in any event). In fact, the best conjecture, based on an appeal to the logic surrounding how citizens are motivated by the convenience and costs of voting, suggests that evidence of this sort can be taken as supportive of a generally positive procedure–turnout relationship – or, conversely stated, of the notion that fewer individuals vote when the alternative is not available. First of all, the convenience factor underlying recourse to an alternative voting process is most properly understood as having wide-ranging variability. To be sure, some individuals will find it only mildly convenient to vote using the substitute procedure and would, if denied that opportunity, cast their ballots on election day. Others, however, will find it moderately convenient and may or may not vote on election day without the alternative. Others, still, will find the backup procedure absolutely vital for the exercise of their franchise. Since voting is a participation act that is particularly sensitive to small changes in benefits, costs and opportunities (Crewe 1981), it is likely non-voting will rise, perhaps exponentially so, across small increments in the range of inconvenience. What is more, in many cases, substitute voting procedures necessitate incurring some additional costs (e.g., making arrangements to get and mail a postal ballot, travelling longer distances to vote in an advance poll), so it is likely that many, if not most, of the electors who intend to vote in an alternative manner are prepared to absorb those costs so as not to forgo voting altogether. This suggests that many would not have or could not have voted on ordinary polling day. To sum up using the ongoing example, if 10 percent of the total votes were cast in advance polls, the inclination is to see the contribution to turnout as being closer to 10 percent than it is to 0 percent.

A natural alternative methodology to the use of country-specific evidence for assessing turnout implications is, of course, cross-national analysis. In the present case, this implies the investigation of statistical relationships between turnout variations across the democratic countries and differences in the micro-institutional arrangements that prevail within them. The analysis might even be extended to see how much of an impact these arrangements have net of, and relative to, the more powerful effects bound up with macro-institutional features.

Unfortunately, this line of analysis could not be pursued as systematically as would have been desirable. The principal reason is the lack of available information on each country's micro-institutional context that is complete and detailed enough to permit accurate and unambiguous cross-national measurement. Even though the present study has put together in one document more information about micro-institutional voting arrangements than any other effort (see Appendix C for listing of sources used), it was still not possible to collect, for each country, precise enough information on key voting features. For example, it would have been ideal in connection with advance polls to develop measures such as the total number of days (better yet, hours) that are available for citizens to vote prior to ordinary polling day. Quantifying the rules of eligibility for advance voting – thus deriving variables such as the proportions of the citizenry entitled to vote in advance polls – would also have been preferred. Alas, in too many instances the data collected did not lend themselves to operationalizations as precise as these.

However, as a second-best strategy, the multivariate analysis in the previous section, undertaken in connection with the macro-institutional voting environment, is brought forward and dummy variables for particular countries are added to the model analysed. These countries, it will be argued, seem to be especially permissive in allowing widespread access to the exercise of the franchise. While a positive coefficient for a country variable provides some sense that turnout is augmented by the country's vote-facilitating arrangements, the evidence is not conclusive. There always remains the possibility that some other feature of the country (e.g., a participant political culture) is, in effect, responsible for the positive coefficient. Nevertheless, such an analysis is hardly a trivial undertaking and, in conjunction with evidence taken from the experience of particular countries, helps build the case for a connection between vote-facilitating micro-institutional arrangements and increased turnout.

Some Working Definitions

In considering the relevance of the legal and administrative conditions governing the facilitation of voting on a cross-national basis, it is advisable to establish some working definitions, even if only in an informal way, because the terms used to characterize the various procedures do not necessarily refer to the same practices in all the countries. The way time and geography criss-cross each other in the usage of the terms "absentee" and "advance" voting is a good example of the potential for disorder in comparative analysis. In general terms, the provision of absentee voting is understood as facilitating the vote for those who would not otherwise be able to exercise their franchise on election day in the appointed polling area. But in specific terms, absentee voting can reference not only physical displacement (some might vote on election day, but in a different area ["constituency transfer"]), it can also imply temporal displacement (some might vote earlier in time, taking advantage of advance voting opportunities). Matters can get even more complicated. In Austria, voters who foresee being absent from their district can vote elsewhere on election day, provided they obtain the appropriate documentation in advance. Then, as well, there are a variety of formats for advance voting, including voting in person or mailing in a ballot.

Another facet of the overlap between time and space is evident in overseas voting. While extending the franchise for citizens who are abroad is becoming more and more the norm in democratic polities (the typical situation is to provide these absentee individuals with the opportunity to vote in advance of election day), the specific methods that are employed vary considerably. In some countries, electors can mail back a ballot; in other countries a proxy must be arranged. In others still, voting must take place at diplomatic missions. As well, for some countries procedures depend upon whether the overseas citizen is living abroad or is simply out of the country on a temporary basis.

Another example of a potential source of confusion is postal voting, quite apart from the fact that the mail is one mechanism that allows for absentee voting. In Sweden, for example, provisions for advance voting include the possibility of voting in post offices. (Some have considered this to be an example of postal voting – the Swedes, themselves, call it such.) But the salient consideration – from the point of view of contemplating the adoption of features in other systems – centres on the fact that the individual does not mail in his or her ballot, so, in effect, this process does not especially differ from the situation where the vote is cast in some other office or polling station.[17] "Postal voting" in Sweden is more properly construed as advance voting.

The working definitions used here certainly do not represent the only approach to organizing the analysis, but they are quite suitable for the various tasks at hand. The following distinctions, drawn in somewhat hierarchical fashion, help supply the definitions. First, a dichotomy is drawn between the domestic voting process and, where it is provided for, procedures allowing voting by nationals who are either living or visiting abroad. Overseas voting will be treated as a single topic or mechanism, regardless of the specific format allowed for (e.g., proxy voting, directly mailed ballot). A proper examination of the much more varied domestic process, however, necessitates further differentiation between absentee voting, on the one hand, and specialized voting arrangements for the sick and elderly, on the other.

Absentee voting opportunities recognize that individuals may be unable to be physically present at the appointed polling division. They form, of course, a broad category – indeed a major category – comprising several specific mechanisms; they are treated individually according to the following working definitions:

1. Advance Voting: the vote is cast prior to election day by the individual in person at a duly recognized election office.
2. Postal Voting: individuals mail in their ballots; the time dimension is considered secondary.
3. Proxy Voting: individuals appoint another person to vote on their behalf; the time dimension is, again, secondary.
4. Constituency Transfer: individuals who are registered in one area (polling station, constituency) may vote in another area; the process takes place on election day. (The situation in Austria alluded to above would be considered as an instance of constituency transfer.)

Messenger voting is also a form of absentee voting inasmuch as the ballot is completed by the elector, often in front of a formal witness, and then a designated person (e.g., in Sweden, a husband or wife) delivers it to the polling station. While messenger voting comes close to being a form of proxy voting, for the most part it is available for those who are physically incapacitated, so it will be considered as a means to facilitate voting for special categories of voters – the sick and the elderly.

Assisted voting is also a "special" voting arrangement. This process refers to a situation in which an elector is physically present at the appointed polling station (on election day) but is incapacitated to some extent (e.g., as a result of blindness, disability or illiteracy) such that help is needed in the marking of the ballot. Special polling stations comprise a third type of special voting arrangement. In most countries, these are set up in institutions to service those individuals, especially the sick and elderly, who are not in, or do not have, private residences. Special polling stations will be dealt with from the point of view of facilitating the vote for these categories of electors, though it is recognized that in some countries, such stations are also set up for other populations, such as prisoners or military personnel. It is also acknowledged that these stations can be set up in "unconventional" settings. Crewe, for example, reports that in New Zealand, "polling stations serving a number of constituencies have been installed at race tracks, Saturday shopping malls, and other places where there are likely to be large crowds. There is even a floating polling station which visits each small settlement in the Marlborough Sounds in the week before polling day" (1981, 248). The establishment of such facilities seems tantamount to the provision of voting opportunities understood as absentee balloting. However, there is less confusion if the current distinction is kept, and in any event, special polling stations are indeed distinctive in the pivotal sense that the polling station is brought to the individual.

Finally, there is election day itself. One potential area of reform centres on the opportunities for voting (in person) on that day. Among the issues addressed in this regard are the hours and days of voting, including rest days.

The exploration of these vote-facilitating conditions begins with a treatment of absentee voting and then moves on to the question of altering the character of voting on election day. Overseas voting is examined next and then, finally, the topic of special polling stations is taken up. In each case, there is a discussion of the current Canadian situation and, where relevant, of the major proposals for reform that have been put forward, especially in the white paper and Bill C-79. (For some procedures, e.g., advance voting, there are short summaries of the history of the procedure.) Comparisons with processes in the other democracies are considered, in different ways, but always with an eye toward clarifying the direction of reform and providing justifications for recommendations. Recommendations are made at the end of the various sections. Some stand on their own to meet concerns of fairness in the voting process, such as in connection with facilitating the vote of the sick and the elderly; others are offered not only in the spirit of allowing citizens sufficient opportunities to vote, but also in the hope of maximizing turnout as a whole and at all levels of the population. In this regard, the analysis tries to marshal as much supporting empirical material as possible. As a final prefatory comment, it should be emphasized that the analysis ignores, for the most part, voting provisions for civil servants and the military. Nearly every system, including the Canadian, provides ample opportunities for its "service workers," including their dependents, to have the right to vote. What is of interest are the opportunities provided for the average citizen.

Absentee Voting

The first type of absentee voting discussed is advance voting, followed by postal voting, proxy voting and constituency transfer, in that order.

The comparative analysis deals not only with these procedures in serial fashion but also, toward the end of this section, with the pattern of absentee opportunities in each country. This is necessary, since each specific procedure does not necessarily address all the different types of absenteeism.

Advance Voting in Canada

The long viewpoint on the history of advance voting in Canada is one of gradual expansion of both the categories of electors eligible to vote in this manner and the concrete opportunities given to those individuals to do so. The pace of expansion or reform has, however, quickened in the more recent past.

For a very long time, only a few restricted groups of electors were able to exercise their franchise at advance polls. In 1920, when advance voting was first introduced, only railway employees, sailors and commercial travellers were eligible and then only if "their prospective absence on ordinary polling day was in the course of their employment" (Qualter 1970, 31) and only if they were registered in a municipality where advance polling stations happened to be offered. Finally, such individuals needed to swear a special affidavit, which among other things affirmed their inability to vote on ordinary polling day. In 1934, access to advance polls was provided, under the same conditions, to the military as a whole as well as to the RCMP. In 1948, fishermen were added to the list of those eligible, while those in the military were deleted since they could now make use of the *Special Voting Rules*. In 1951, members of the reserve forces were added to the list of the eligible.

Sharp limitations on who could vote in advance polls very much reflected the ethos prevailing at the time, namely, that voting in such a manner represented an unusual departure. Indeed, from 1934 to 1960, the various versions of the *Canada Elections Act* characterized advance voting as a "privilege" (Canada, Elections Canada 1990, communiqué). It is hardly surprising, then, that the opportunities for advance voting reflected the circumscribed numbers eligible. Certainly, this is true in the case of the actual number of advance polls established. Throughout this period, the number of such polls per election averaged around 218, while the number of ordinary polls averaged 30 533.

At the same time, the total number of hours available to vote at advance polls did increase over this earlier period. Initially, only nine hours, over three days, were provided for in the elections from 1921 through to 1930, while those voting in advance polls in the 1935 election had 14 hours of opportunity spread out, again, over three days; from 1940 until 1958, 24 hours were provided, also over a three-day period.

The total number of both advance and ordinary polls and the ratio between the polling station types for each election from 1945 to 1988 are shown in table 3.11. As is quite plain, there is a sharp disjuncture between the 1958 and 1962 elections. The former election witnessed the setting up of 256 advance polling stations, while the latter election saw an almost eightfold increase to 1 863. The marked change is also apparent in the sharp drop in the ratio of ordinary-to-advance stations from 174:1 to 27:1. The establishment of more advance polling stations reflected, most predominantly, the significant changes manifested in the 1960 Act. Gone were the specified occupational categories of eligibility, replaced by a far more permissive clause that gave the right to vote to anyone who thought he or she would be unable to cast a ballot on election day. The provision of many more advance polling stations matched this wider definition of eligibility.

Table 3.11
Number of ordinary and advance polling stations in Canadian general elections, 1945–88

	Polling stations		
Election	Ordinary	Advance	Ratio
1945	33 725	191	177:1
1949	38 030	207	183:1
1953	40 742	243	168:1
1957	44 055	230	192:1
1958	44 595	256	174:1
1962	49 837	1 863	27:1
1963	50 380	1 807	28:1
1965	52 567	1 822	29:1
1968	51 253	1 792	29:1
1972	61 233	2 334	26:1
1974	64 416	2 919	22:1
1979	70 841	2 832	25:1
1980	70 620	2 833	25:1
1984	65 726	2 755	24:1
1988	55 397	2 463	23:1

Sources: Canada, Elections Canada, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer*, special tabulations provided.

The total number of votes cast in the 1945–74 period, as well as those counted at advance polls, in absolute terms and as a percentage of the former, are displayed in table 3.12. The data are clear in demonstrating that many electors did, indeed, take advantage of these new expanded voting opportunities provided for in the 1960 Act. Until 1958, only about ten or eleven thousand votes were cast at advance polling stations – between 0.15 percent and 0.19 percent of all the votes cast – but in 1962, nearly 10 times more Canadians voted early. This represented a more substantial 1.27 percent of the total number of votes. After 1962, the percentages fluctuate considerably, but generally the data show a trend of more and more Canadians availing themselves of advance voting opportunities. In 1974, 444 334 Canadians, representing 4.59 percent of all those voting, did so at advance polls.

Changes in the 1960 Act were followed by additional categories of eligibility in 1970. It was now possible to vote at advance polls if "because of advanced age, infirmity or the probable termination of pregnancy" it was more convenient to do so (section 93(*b*)) or if "because of his religious beliefs or his membership in a religious order [the elector] is unable to vote in the polling division throughout the hours or the greater

Table 3.12
Advance votes cast in Canadian general elections, 1945–74

	Votes cast		
Election	Total	Advance	Advance as % of total
1945	5 305 193	10 086	0.19
1949	5 903 572	11 189	0.19
1953	5 701 963	10 479	0.18
1957	6 680 690	11 780	0.18
1958	7 357 139	11 228	0.15
1962	7 772 656	98 447	1.27
1963	7 958 636	85 276	1.07
1965	7 796 728	119 285	1.53
1968	8 217 916	193 922	2.36
1972	9 974 661	154 385	1.55
1974	9 671 002	444 334	4.59

Sources: Canada, Elections Canada, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer*; special tabulations provided.

part of the hours of polling on the ordinary polling day" (section 93(*c*)). It is difficult to know how many people in these two specific categories actually voted in subsequent elections, but, in any event, their numbers would not be large enough to be picked up in the percentages in table 3.12.

Two major innovations preceded the 1979 general election and remain in effect today. In 1977, the requirement for an affidavit was dispensed with, making it easier for individuals to vote at advance polling stations (though it is still possible for the deputy returning officer to ask for identification from the elector or demand that the prospective voter take the prescribed oath). Of equal significance, registered individuals could now also vote prior to election day in the office of the returning officer, in front of either that official or the election clerk. To be eligible to do so, the intending voter must produce satisfactory proof of identification and sign a declaration, stating "the reason why he believes that he will be unable to vote on the days fixed for the advance poll and the ordinary poll" (section 97(4)(*b*)(ii)).

While these are only modestly stringent impediments, they constitute potential obstacles, especially to those who are less confident about, and skilled at, dealing with bureaucrats and their procedures. Accessibility to early voting in this manner is probably limited somewhat by these requirements. On the positive side, there are many more days and hours available for early voting in the office of the returning officer, relative to advance voting.[18] The record of the incidence of early voting is updated in table 3.13. In 1979, only 28 231 Canadians voted in the office of a returning officer, or 0.24 percent of all votes cast. The figures for the winter election of 1980 show a dramatic increase to 47 607

Table 3.13
Votes cast in the office of the returning officer and advance votes in Canadian general elections, 1979–88

		Returning office		Advance polls	
Election	Total	*N*	% of total	*N*	% of total
1979	11 541 000	28 231	0.24	301 978	2.62
1980	11 015 514	47 607	0.43	428 990	3.89
1984	12 638 424	125 232	0.99	585 102	4.63
1988	13 281 191	107 520	0.85	507 926	3.82

Sources: Canada, Elections Canada, *Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer*; special tabulations provided.

votes or 0.43 percent, while the highest totals were achieved in 1984, when 125 232 electors, representing 0.99 percent of all voters, cast ballots in such a manner. In 1988, there was a bit of a drop-off – 107 520 votes or 0.85 percent – but the larger message is that many Canadians took advantage of these particular expanded voting opportunities in spite of the bureaucratic (and travel) impediments.

Updated figures are also shown for voting in regular advance polls and indicate that large numbers of Canadians continue to exercise their franchise in this fashion. Of course, it is quite impossible to know what the figures might have been had voting in the office of the returning officer not been implemented. Still, the existing numbers are impressive in and of themselves. In the two most recent elections, over a half million Canadians voted in advance polls, representing 4.63 and 3.82 percent of all votes cast (1984 and 1988, respectively).

Adding the vote tallies from the two possibilities of early participation provides the summary perspective. If evidence from the last three elections represents a stable enough basis for judgement, it would appear that the counts have been consistently substantial. In 1980, altogether, 476 597 ballots were cast in advance polls or in the office of the returning officer, which is equivalent to 4.32 percent of all votes cast; in 1984, 710 334 (or 5.62 percent of all votes cast) were so cast. Finally, in 1988, the number was 615 446 (or 4.67 percent of all votes cast). While these data do not lead to the conclusion that the use of early voting is necessarily increasing from election to election, it does seem safe to say that an extraordinarily large number of citizens, in absolute terms, are now making routine use of voting opportunities in advance of election day.

As already pointed out, given the inability to know exactly how many of these citizens would have voted in any event, it is not possible to claim that four or five percentage points clearly represent early voting's contribution to turnout.[19] Yet, it was also suggested that the true impact is closer to the numbers observed than to zero. In the specific case of advance voting, it might also be noted that for a variety of reasons, many Canadians do find themselves away from home at any given point in time, including the day on which the election is held. The increase in the incidence of travel, for business and leisure, likely means many would not be able to exercise their franchise without advance voting opportunities.

This suggests that the reforms contemplated in the white paper and adopted in Bill C-79 would be of some value not only in providing more opportunities for early voting but possibly in increasing turnout. First of all, any reason for being absent on election day is, according to the reform proposals, sufficient justification for having the right to vote at an advance poll. Voting in the office of the returning officer is also easier; individuals need only sign a statement that they are unable to avail themselves of other voting opportunities. Moreover, the ballot could also be cast in the office of additional election clerks or in front of other officials designated by the returning officer.

However, the reforms did not contemplate changes in the number of days on which individuals could make use of these opportunities. Especially noteworthy is the preservation of three days for voting at advance polls. Other countries that have advance voting generally allow for an extended period of time during which electors can vote in such a manner. A consideration of those countries will provide additional support for the importance of advance voting for turnout levels.

Advance Voting in Other Democracies

The existence of advance voting in Canada is in keeping with the democratic experience in a great many countries, though by no means all.

Table 3.14
Absentee voting provisions in 18 other democracies

Countries	Advance voting	Postal voting	Proxy voting	Constituency transfer
Compulsory voting				
Australia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Belgium	No	No	Yes	No
Italy	No	No	No	No
Voluntary voting				
Austria	No	No	No	Yes
Denmark	Yes	No	No	No
Finland	Yes	No	No	No
France	No	No	Yes	No
Germany	No	Yes	No	No
Ireland	No	No	No	No
Israel	No	No	No	No
Japan	Yes	Yes[a]	No	No
Netherlands	No	No	Yes	Yes
New Zealand	Yes	No	No	Yes
Norway	Yes	No	No	No
Sweden	Yes	No	No	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
United Kingdom	No	Yes	Yes	No
United States	No	Yes	Varies	No

Sources: See Appendix C.

[a] Persons with disabilities only.

Among the three countries with compulsory voting (Australia, Belgium and Italy), only Australia provides for advance voting opportunities, known as "pre-poll" votes (see table 3.14, first column). On the other hand, among the other 15 nations, almost half (seven) provide for at least some degree of early voting. The greatest regional concentration of advance voting is in northern Europe, where all four Scandinavian countries provide for it. Japan and New Zealand, as well, have provisions for early voting, as does Switzerland, though in the Swiss case, arrangements vary from canton to canton.

Table 3.15 provides, for these eight countries, a bit of detail in connection with what are really the two key dimensions of advance voting, eligibility and (time) opportunity. A cursory glance at the distribution of eligibility criteria indicates that Canada, in proposing to allow advance voting to all (who would be unable to vote on ordinary polling day), is moving toward a position already occupied by most countries. Six of those eight countries allow virtually all their citizens to vote in advance polls. Japan and New Zealand are the exceptions. Japan is the most restrictive. Only those who will be absent on business or those whose freedom of movement is restricted (due to

Table 3.15
Advance voting in eight other democracies: Eligibility and opportunity

Countries	Eligibility	Opportunity
Australia	all	entire campaign period
Denmark	all	3 weeks
Finland	all	13 days
Japan	away on business or restricted movement	entire campaign period
New Zealand	"special voting" for those who find it difficult to vote in a normal manner on polling day; in practice, widespread availability but application and declaration required	entire campaign period
Norway	all	18 days
Sweden	all	24 days
Switzerland	all	varies by canton

Sources: See Appendix C.

illness, pregnancy, disability or incarceration) are entitled to vote in advance. In New Zealand, the possibility of "early voting," as it is officially known, is connected to eligibility to cast a "special vote." While the criteria for eligibility are fairly generous, prospective early voters must still face some red tape and, in particular, must complete a declaration of the grounds for seeking an early vote.

It is, however, in connection with the time dimension that the Canadian situation is noticeably deficient. Canada has only three days for advance voting, while most countries have more. In Switzerland, the number of advance polling days is set by the cantons, but federal law dictates that a minimum of two of the last four days before the election must be devoted to the establishment of advance polls. Among the other countries, the time period tends to cover much of the campaign period, typically with two or three weeks of advance voting days. Thus, Canada, with only three days for advance voting, tends to stand by itself. It might be argued that the 14 days allowed for voting in the offices of constituency election officials should be added to the three advance days. The trouble with this view is that voting in those offices is still somewhat difficult to accomplish; most of those countries that have more days for advance voting provide for a straightforward process for all those days.

Besides showing the existence of more opportunities for advance voting in other democracies, the comparative record can also be taken as suggestive that advance voting is an important mainstay in the overall voting process. Indeed, available evidence from four countries – Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and Sweden – at least leans toward the conclusion that advance voting contributes to an overall higher level of turnout. Each of the four countries can be reviewed briefly in turn.

The evidence from the Australian case is perhaps the least appropriate in terms of the lessons it can provide because of the country's compulsory voting. On the other hand, Australia is also somewhat atypical in providing its electorate with such a vast array of different types of voting opportunities; indeed, it is unique in providing for postal voting and constituency transfer, in addition to advance voting. Thus, Australia is of possible interest because its citizens have many alternative ways of exercising their right to vote.

The permissive criteria for eligibility and lengthy timeframe for voting in advance in Australia translate into a modest, but certainly a nontrivial, contribution to overall turnout. The very latest information on the last (March 1990) election for the House of Representatives, received from the Australian Electoral Commission (1990, communiqué), indicates that 299 926 votes were cast as "pre-poll" votes. Some of these votes are apparently overseas votes, for which a separate breakdown is not provided. Nevertheless, it does seem unlikely that the latter would amount to a very large number; a safe estimate is that perhaps a quarter of a million advance votes were cast in the domestic context. This represents about 2.5 percent of the total number of votes in that election. While this is not a large figure by itself, again, it is perhaps noteworthy, given the several different alternatives available to Australians to vote in absentee fashion.

Figures provided by the Chief Electoral Office of New Zealand (1990, communiqué) for the 1987 election indicate that 41 680 early votes were cast by voters in their own districts – which translates into 2.2 percent of all the ballots cast during that election. However, the actual number of early votes cast is much greater because New Zealand is especially generous in allowing voters the casting of an early ballot outside of their district. Unfortunately, such figures are not separately kept, so there is no way of knowing the exact total number (and percentage) of early votes. The figure of 2.2 percent is thus a minimum figure.

In Denmark, advance voting is widely available, effectively for all who feel they will not be able to go to the polls on election day. No application is necessary. In general, voting takes place at the national registration office in each municipality, where votes can be cast from up to three weeks in advance of election day. The current period of voting opportunity dates back to 1965 and contrasts with the period from 1953 to 1964, when electors had only three pre-election days during which to vote, and from 1964 to 1965, when electors had seven days.

Some evidence concerning the numbers and percentages of Danes voting in advance of election day is available as of the 1971 election. The data, provided by the Danish government (1990, communiqué), also include overseas votes, but the evidence is still worth serious consideration because only a relatively small proportion of the reported total could possibly be attributed to votes cast by the two categories of Danes abroad. One category comprises those who are residing abroad (e.g., civil servants, students), the other, those who maintain permanent residency in Denmark and are, therefore, absent on a temporary basis (e.g., on business or vacation). Separate records are kept only of the former, but on the reasonable assumption that the second category is not a large one, some inferences about the amount of domestic advance voting are possible. For example, in the 1988 election a total of 150 835 advance and overseas votes (4.5 percent of all votes) were cast. Records show that, at most, 3 119 of such votes could have been cast by

Danish civil servants and students. If the generous assumption is made that about an equal number of Danes temporarily abroad voted, then a reasonable estimate is that about 145 000 ballots were advance votes cast in Denmark itself – about 4.25 percent of the total.

The unadjusted percentages – the total number of advance and overseas votes – for the elections from 1971 up to the most recent one in 1990 are shown in table 3.16. As can be seen, were it not for the last election, it might be possible to argue that there has been a gradual increase over time in the relative frequency with which Danes have cast their ballots in advance. Still, the fact that there is a nontrivial and constant core of votes cast in such a manner is a fact that should not be diminished. This said, it might still be surprising to some that more early votes are not cast. After all, advance voting in Denmark seems to involve little in the way of bureaucratic hurdles and is possible over a fairly lengthy period of time (three weeks); moreover, similar sorts of percentages were noted in connection with the more restrictive Canadian case. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the distance some voters have to travel to the single municipal registration office.

Only when one turns to the Swedish case can an appreciation be gained of the magnitude of advance voting that is possible. Advance voting in Sweden takes place at post offices. This might be a big difference between the Danish and Swedish cases; Swedes only have to

Table 3.16
Advance voting in Denmark, 1971–90

Election	Advance votes as % of total votes[a]
1971	3.1
1973	2.7
1975	2.7
1979	3.6
1981	2.9
1984	3.5
1987	5.3
1988	4.5
1990	3.5

Source: Danish Ministry of the Interior.

[a] Includes a small number of "overseas" votes; see text.

travel to their local post offices to vote. The system was first introduced in 1942 and initially applied to the military, some civil servants, transportation workers and individuals who were out of their hometown on election day. Such individuals were entitled to vote as early as 30 days prior to the election. The system was opened up in 1970, allowing anyone to vote in advance, though the starting date was brought forward until the 24th day before the election (Sweden, Swedish Tax Administration 1990, communiqué). No major changes have occurred since that date, but election data from the 1973 election onward (see table 3.17) show clearly how important advance voting was from the start and how even more important it has become over time. These figures, it must be pointed out, also include constituency transfer votes, but detailed results available in connection with the 1985 election indicate quite clearly that the latter method of voting represents only a small fraction of the total. Only 39 073 of the 2 077 905 1985 votes were cast in the context of constituency transfer, meaning that 36.3 percent were clearly cast as advance votes. Thus, the table's entry of 37.0 percent hardly conveys an exaggerated picture. More generally, the data demonstrate in absolutely clear terms that advance voting became an important method of voting from the very start and grew in significance. By the 1980s, over one-third of Swedish voters were consistently availing themselves of these voting opportunities.

What adds weight to the significance of these data is the constancy of eligibility and opportunity that has been characteristic of this period. It cannot be claimed that more Swedes are voting early because more

Table 3.17
Advance voting in Sweden, 1973–88

	Advance votes[a]	
Election	*N*	As % of total votes
1973	689 940	13.3
1976	1 143 748	21.0
1979	1 466 231	26.8
1982	1 917 771	34.2
1985	2 077 905	37.0
1988	1 944 865	36.5

Source: Swedish National Tax Board.

[a] Includes a small number of "constituency transfer" votes; see text.

are eligible or because they have been given more time to do so. In fact, if anything, there have been, in a sense, fewer opportunities over time as the number of post offices available for voting has decreased. In 1965, there were 3 383 throughout the country, and in 1988 there were 2 070 (Sweden, Swedish Tax Administration 1990, communiqué). In the final analysis, it is the sheer volume of advance voting taking place in Sweden that makes the country's experience so interesting and that constitutes more than suggestive evidence about a positive connection with turnout. Quite simply, when the numbers reach the stunning levels they do in Sweden – when one out of every three Swedes votes in advance polls – it is difficult to escape the conclusion that turnout, which is generally quite high in the country, would suffer to some degree if opportunities for early voting did not exist. The implication is that advance voting contributes to Sweden's superior turnout rate.[20]

Generally speaking, the evidence from the four countries, and indeed, Canada itself, suggests that advance voting has become an important mainstay in the repertoire of voting opportunities. There are suggestions that without it, turnout levels would be lower and, extending the point in the other direction, with more opportunities for advance voting, turnout levels might be higher.

Postal Voting

Canada currently does not allow for postal voting (apart from the process that allows military and civil servants overseas the opportunity to vote). Nor has postal voting been seriously contemplated, at least judging by the white paper. It is true that postal voting, relative to advance voting, is slightly less of an empirical norm among the democracies. While eight countries permit advance voting, only six provide for the casting of a ballot by mail (in the ordinary domestic context) as seen in table 3.14 (second column). It should be emphasized that this includes a quite generous reading of the Japanese case, which provides only the physically handicapped with the opportunity to cast postal ballots.

Once again, Australia is alone, among the compulsory voting countries, in allowing for postal voting, and it does so on a widespread basis. Individuals fill out an application form, available from post offices, and then receive their ballot papers by return mail. These papers must then be completed and posted to the Electoral Commission before polling day. Certain individuals are able to register as "General Postal Voters" and thus receive application forms automatically; moreover, in special circumstances handicapped electors can arrange to have ballot papers sent automatically without application (Australian Electoral Commission, various pamphlets).

It should be noted that another compulsory voting country, Belgium, had implemented voting by mail in 1970 for electors, according to van den Berghe, "who, because of illness or physical ability, could not be moved or leave their place of work to vote" but six years later the country abandoned the process, although the same author only alludes to the reasons ("as it had caused some abuse") (1979, 9). Abuse was also at the centre of the decision to do away with postal voting in a voluntary voting country – France (Georgel 1979, 100). This decision was made in 1975, some 30 years after its introduction. Concern about fraud and abuse might, of course, be one reason for postal voting's limited appeal, in addition to whatever economic (cost) factors are operative.

In other postal-voting countries, it is unclear whether there are serious problems of fraud. No discussion of fraud was found in connection with the German case, which has had postal voting widely available to the citizenry since 1957. Perhaps the safeguards that are used minimize fraud. Electors must apply for the postal ballot in front of election officials in the commune in which they are registered. When the ballots are mailed back, they must "be accompanied by a sworn statement certifying that the vote represents the free choice of the elector," and their validity is then "determined by the panel of presiding officials for postal votes" (Sasse 1979, 65–66).

Postal voting in Britain has been possible from just after the end of the Second World War, with criteria for eligibility expanding over time. Since 1987, it has been widely available to "all those who, including holidaymakers, cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person at the polling station" (United Kingdom, Central Office 1987, 7). Postal ballot papers are sent, upon application, and must be returned along with a declaration of identity, duly witnessed by a third party. Before the ballot is considered, the declaration is checked against the electors' list. It was difficult to find substantiated evidence of fraud, at least on a noticeable scale. There have been, to be sure, newspaper-based allegations of fraud from time to time, typically minor or local in nature (especially in connection with Northern Ireland), but there is no evidence of major abuse, perhaps a function of the safeguards.

Evidence about the relative incidence of postal voting is more difficult to come by. No information could be found for Switzerland, while for the German case, there is a passing reference by Phillips and Blackman (1975, 92) to the effect that about 5 percent of the votes cast in that country's elections are of the postal variety. This is a sizable figure, though it must be noted that specific sources are not cited by the authors. On the other hand, this is the only form of domestic absentee voting provided for in Germany, so it is conceivable that a significant proportion of its citizenry has to rely on this one alternative to election day voting.

This would be consistent with the Australian case, which provides more opportunities for absentee voting and, correspondingly, where the proportion who vote by post is smaller. An estimated one-quarter of a million votes, or 2.2 percent of all votes, cast in the 1990 House of Representatives election were of this sort. The figure must be estimated because the government does not keep separate tallies, but the available evidence does permit the possibility of a reasonably accurate adjustment, resulting in the estimate given (Australian Electoral Commission 1990, communiqué). Admittedly, this point that lower levels of postal voting might be due to the availability of other absentee ballot options suffers from the uncertainty of the nature of comparisons across voluntary versus compulsory voting countries. Moreover, working in the British case does not clarify the issue because there is no information on how many Britons use proxy voting, the only alternative form of absentee balloting. This makes it difficult to get a sense of how to size up the proportion who do make use of postal voting, about 2 to 2.5 percent. This is a range of figures that has pretty much remained steady over time (Butler 1989; United Kingdom, Home Office 1990, communiqué).

Finally, mention should be made of some findings in connection with the U.S. case, which, taken altogether, suggest a correlation between turnout and more widespread access to mail ballot possibilities. While these studies have typically focused on subnational elections, there appears to be consensus that the use of postal ballots does enhance turnout (e.g., Hamilton 1988; Magleby 1987; Patterson and Caldeira 1985).

Proxy Voting in Canada

Initially, proxy voting in Canada (introduced in 1944) was restricted to Canadian prisoners of war. In 1970, the list of those eligible to vote in this manner was expanded, but only modestly so, to include fishermen, mariners, prospectors, the physically ill or disabled and full-time students. (In 1977 members of aircrews, forestry crews and topographical survey crews were added to the list, along with trappers.) Even these individuals, however, could only receive a proxy certificate if they were unable to avail themselves of advance voting opportunities. Moreover, the designated proxy voter had to be someone who was registered in the same polling division (Canada, Elections Canada 1990, communiqué). Altogether, the process is far from routine. For example, students have to support their application with proof of university registration, and, as the white paper points out, some rural dwellers have to travel long distances to get a proxy certificate.

It is hardly surprising, as a consequence, that proxy voting comprises only a minuscule proportion of the total votes cast. In point of fact, there are no easily available statistics on the number of proxy votes cast. However, Elections Canada has supplied information about the number of proxy certificates issued in some recent elections. In 1972, 12 574 certificates were given out and in 1974 and 1980, 6 915 and 13 400 were issued respectively (Canada, Elections Canada 1990, communiqué). Even if all the proxies had been exercised – and this is unlikely – they would still only have constituted at most between 0.07 and 0.13 percent of the total votes cast in the elections mentioned.

The white paper envisioned expanded usage of proxy voting, as did Bill C-79. Proxy voting would have been available to anyone "absent from the electoral district" without further qualification; moreover, no supporting evidence would have been demanded to obtain the certificate. Alterations were also anticipated in connection with securing the certificate – it could be obtained up to the day before the election, as opposed to the Friday before, and, importantly, the designated voter only had to be registered in the same constituency.[21] No doubt these modifications would have led to more proxy voting, but it is difficult to say how much more.

Proxy Voting in Other Democracies

As in the case of postal voting, only a handful of countries allow for proxy voting, as seen in table 3.14. Belgium is alone among the compulsory voting nations in providing for its usage, while among the voluntary voting democracies, four do so – France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (not counting the United States, where it is available in some states). As can be imagined, there are both common and unique elements among the countries with regard to the specific rules and procedures. For example, it is generally available on a widespread basis, though in Belgium work-related absence requires an attestation. The process also requires as a rule an application. Typically the application is in written form, but in the Netherlands it is possible to make an oral application. There are also limits on the number of proxies any voter can hold (two, for example, in France and the United Kingdom – unless, in the latter case, a close relative is involved). In Belgium prior to 1976, there were no limits on the number of proxies that could be exercised, but concerns that some electors were "collecting" proxies led to a change, after which only family members could hold proxies.

Canada, in expanding eligibility for proxy voting, is moving to a position already occupied by countries that provide for voting this way. Unfortunately, in no case were hard data available that could determine the relationship of proxy voting to turnout. Indeed, it was not even possible to come up with the simple incidence of proxy voting in any country. The only bit of information obtained is from a Belgian election official, who indicated a decline in proxy voting as a result of the restriction of proxy holders to family members.

The best guess is that the impact of proxy voting on turnout is muted because of the paperwork and procedures required; this likely deters many would-be users of the process. Fraud is also a dimension of concern with proxy voting but probably less so than with postal voting. There are also, of course, the additional doubts that a proxy holder may not vote as intended.

Constituency Transfer

Canada provides for no mechanism by which large numbers of individuals are able to cast their ballots outside the appointed polling area. (Two small categories of individuals can, however, obtain "transfer certificates," which entitle them to vote at other polling stations. Deputy returning officers and other local election officials, candidates and their scrutineers are able to obtain such certificates, as can people with disabilities in order to have the opportunity of voting at an advance poll that has a level access.) Nor has constituency transfer been contemplated seriously as an absentee balloting procedure. The white paper makes no mention of it at all.

Canada is not alone in denying this opportunity to voters at large, as seen in table 3.14. Only five democracies allow for it, Australia among the compulsory voting nations, and Austria, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden in the voluntary voting category. As always, there is a bit of variety in the exact procedures followed. As noted, in Austria, individuals must apply in advance, and the same is true of the Netherlands (an easy process, according to Dutch officials, because the system is computerized). Australian electors can turn up unannounced in any polling station in the same state or territory and, in the case of New Zealand, in any polling station anywhere in the country. In both instances, electors are asked to sign a declaration or statement.

Evidence from the latter two countries indicates the potential number of votes that can be cast in other polling stations and districts. In the Australian 1990 elections, 646 476 votes were cast by individuals outside of their electoral division, amounting to a very sizable 6.3 percent of the total vote. As always, the legal requirement that Australians must vote qualifies the use of the Australian experience as an appropriate standard. Data from the more appropriate New Zealand case are, however, not as conclusive as one would like. Constituency transfer is only one of the categories of "special voting" allowed for, but breakdowns are not provided of the different forms. That said, it would seem that constituency transfer represents a major category and therefore comprises a goodly part of the over 10.4 percent of the special ballots cast (New Zealand, Royal Commission 1986, 259).

Finally, there are some figures for the Swedish case that suggest that constituency transfer is not a major means of voting. Only 39 073 Swedes voted in this manner in the 1985 election, a scant 0.70 percent of the total votes cast (Sweden, Swedish Tax Administration 1990, communiqué). However, given the apparent ease with which those who will be outside their districts can vote in advance, it is perhaps not surprising that few need to rely on constituency transfer.

Patterns of Absentee Voting Provisions

This latter point does suggest the need to give some consideration to the overall pattern of absentee voting provisions since many of the mechanisms overlap in servicing voters' needs. The Swedish case suggests that constituency transfer is less of a requirement, given that widespread advance voting opportunities are available.

Summaries of the absentee voting arrangements in each country, as well as their average turnout level for the 1980s, can be seen in table 3.18. The temptation is to see if there is a correlation between some patterns and turnout, but at the outset, there appear to be real challenges to seeing any relationship whatsoever. Among the voluntary voting countries, only Switzerland has as many as three provisions (advance, postal and proxy voting), yet it has the lowest turnout of all the 18 countries. Since such provisions vary considerably by canton, it is unclear how much of this "anomaly" is due to relatively less liberal provisions, but certain systemic factors, not connected to vote facilitation, are overwhelmingly important in the Swiss case in accounting for massive nonparticipation. Indeed, perhaps turnout would be lower without such provisions. On the other hand, two countries that make no provisions for absentee voting whatsoever, Ireland and Israel, have, on average, somewhat lower turnout levels. Among the compulsory voting countries, Australia is alone in providing three forms of absentee balloting, all except proxy voting. Perhaps this accounts for Australia's high turnout rate relative to Italy, which allows for none of the methods of absentee voting. After all, over 11 percent of the votes cast in the Australian 1990 elections were in the form, one way or another, of absentee ballots (see the individual totals given above).

Of the voluntary voting countries, the modal position (seven countries, eight if Japan is included) is the provision of only one type of absentee balloting, and among these countries, the tendency is to offer advance voting opportunities (Denmark, Finland and Norway); Japan might also be listed, given that its provision for postal voting is quite restrictive. Proxy voting is next with two countries, if its provision by some U.S. states is noted. Germany and Austria allow for one form each. Four voluntary voting countries provide for two forms of absentee balloting. Two countries with very high levels of turnout, New Zealand and Sweden, have advance voting and constituency transfer; and one with high turnout, the Netherlands, has proxy voting and constituency transfer, while the United Kingdom has postal and proxy voting. It might be tempting to suggest that constituency transfer makes a difference for higher turnout, except it is clear that constituency transfer amounts to very few votes in the Swedish case. On the other hand, constituency

Table 3.18
Patterns of absentee voting and turnout in 18 democracies

Countries	Advance voting	Postal voting	Proxy voting	Constituency transfer	Average turnout 1980s (%)
Compulsory voting					
Australia	Yes	Yes	–	Yes	94.3
Belgium	–	–	Yes	–	93.8
Italy	–	–	–	–	89.8
Voluntary voting					
Austria	–	–	–	Yes	91.5
Denmark	Yes	–	–	–	86.1
Finland	Yes	–	–	–	78.2
France	–	–	Yes	–	86.2
Germany	–	Yes	–	–	87.3
Ireland	–	–	–	–	74.2
Israel	–	–	–	–	79.0
Japan	Yes	Yes	–	–	71.4
Netherlands	–	–	Yes	Yes	83.4
New Zealand	Yes	–	–	Yes	90.5
Norway	Yes	–	–	–	83.1
Sweden	Yes	–	–	Yes	89.1
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	47.5
United Kingdom	–	Yes	Yes	–	74.0
United States	–	Yes	Varies	–	52.0

Sources: See Appendices B and C; table 3.5.

transfer may be irrelevant in the latter country, given the widespread use of advance voting.

These country-by-country inspections are too crude to allow for accurate insights into the relationship between the facilitation of absentee voting and turnout. As suggested in the introduction, ideally, cross-national data analysis should entail the conversion of the different facets of vote-encouraging arrangements found in each country into different scores on common indicators. Given that information detailed and complete enough to be able to do so is not readily available, a next best procedure centres on testing whether or not countries with particularly permissive arrangements for absentee voting do indeed have higher levels of turnout. This query should, of course, take into account those factors that play a major role in accounting for across-system turnout differences – in other words, the macro-institutional factors discussed in the previous section.

Three countries are taken as possible candidates for such a test – Australia, New Zealand and Sweden. All three have, relatively speaking, permissive absentee voting arrangements and can claim some evidence that significant numbers of their citizenry do make use of such arrangements. Dummy variables for the three countries were entered into the regression equations representing the two models that received the most support in the analysis in the previous section. One, it will be recalled, incorporated the electoral formulae as explicit variables; the other substituted the vote–seat gap (i.e., disproportionality) measure for the formulae.

Results for both models are shown in table 3.19. Considering the scarcity of degrees of freedom in the statistical enterprise and the expectation for the macro-institutional factors to dominate the determination of variations in turnout, the results are rather interesting. Not only is the coefficient for New Zealand positive in both models, it is strikingly large and easily achieves statistical significance. For the model incorporating the electoral formulae variables, the regression coefficient is a substantial 20.17 and is larger than all other coefficients, save the one for Switzerland; the same is true of the result in the other model (16.95). No doubt, there are other specific facets about the New Zealand situation that are being captured in the result – perhaps its participant culture or strong party–group linkages – but what is inviting to think about, and not entirely unreasonable to do so, is the prospect that some part of the observed result is due to the more permissive approach the country takes toward absentee voting.

The result for Sweden is less dramatic but is still of considerable interest. Its coefficients are positive in both models as well – indicating

Table 3.19
Regression models of voter turnout and institutional characteristics, with additional country dummy variables, 1980s

Independent variables	(1)	(2)
Compulsory voting	10.02 (4.20/.044)	13.93 (4.28/.010)
Switzerland dummy	-40.40 (5.51/.001)	-33.81 (5.73/.001)
Unicameralism	-0.22 (1.11/.850)	1.10 (1.13/.350)
Federalism	5.90 (3.15/.099)	6.32 (3.41/.096)
Plurality system	-10.80 (3.15/.009)	–
Majority system	-11.57 (4.76/.014)	–
Disproportionality	–	-0.66 (0.22/.013)
Australia dummy	7.95 (7.94/.346)	2.43 (6.87/.732)
Sweden dummy	7.97 (4.68/.127)	6.29 (5.23/.261)
New Zealand dummy	20.17 (5.48/.006)	16.95 (5.50/.013)
Constant	82.00	80.45
R^2	.94	.91
F-ratio	12.92	11.70
(N=18)		

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients; figures in parentheses are standard errors and statistical significance levels.

that turnout is six to eight points beyond what would be expected based on the operation of the macro-level forces – but they do not achieve statistical significance at customary levels. Still, one coefficient (7.97) is not far off the mark, perhaps a noteworthy result in light of the large number of variables in the equation. The coefficients for Australia vary in the two equations, but while both have the expected (positive) signs, they fail to achieve statistical significance at conventional levels.

There are some other aspects of the results that are notable, including the considerably increased amount of explained variation in turnout brought about by the addition of these three dummy variables (compare with table 3.10). As well, the stronger results for the formulae variables but decidedly weaker ones for the measure of unicameralism are particularly intriguing. These involve some complicated matters that would require, among other things, revisiting some of the elements of the debate about macro-institutional effects addressed in the previous section. It suffices simply to point out that this additional statistical analysis, though certainly a modest and limited exercise, does provide some evidence that is at least consistent with the view that some countries' permissive absentee voting arrangements do have a payoff in terms of higher turnout. Adding these results to the logical arguments made about such a linkage and to the case study data already viewed leads to somewhat more confidence that vote-facilitating reforms in this area can make a difference in increasing turnout.

That reforms have the potential to increase turnout is especially important in connection with absentee voting provisions because there are large numbers of voters involved. Some practical and especially financial aspects (not addressed here), however, must be factored into the decisions. What also emerges from the cross-national investigation of absentee voting is that Canada, with its two forms of such voting, is close to the democratic norm. But it is also true that other countries tend to allow for a more generous usage of whatever forms they have.

Recommendations about Advance Voting

The first recommendation is for the provision of more opportunities for advance voting, and indeed more than those envisioned by the white paper and Bill C-79. The critical matter is not who is eligible to vote in advance polls. The momentum for reform in this regard, in the direction of expanding access, is well under way and coincides with what is available in most democracies providing for advance voting. At issue are the opportunities for individuals to vote in advance. The current situation, allowing for only three days, is restrictive and is not improved upon in Bill C-79. To be sure, voting in the office of the returning officer, and the contemplated changes, are a welcomed part of the voting repertoire, as are the 14 days for such a type of advance voting. Nevertheless, voting in such a manner is best thought of as a backup possibility and thus may not carry the same legitimacy as "ordinary" advance voting. Indeed, the prospective voter, even under the Bill C-79 regime, would still need to sign a form indicating that other voting opportunities cannot be exploited. Moreover, contemplated reforms do not include providing for additional days of voting in the office of the returning officer.

While allowing for more hours of voting in such offices is cheaper than having more days of advance polls (presumably because the officials are there in any event), the counter-argument is that the costs are even higher in terms of the number of Canadians who are unable to vote. The case should be for more days, but what should be the precise number of days is difficult to say. Cross-nationally, about three weeks seem to be the norm.

There are arguments to limit the number of days, or more properly, the number of votes cast in advance polls. One argument might come from the political parties, which would have a harder time keeping their canvassing efforts properly focused, given that they are currently directed toward mobilizing on the single election day. The same is true of their publicity campaigns. The second argument is that "too much early voting would lessen the importance of voting itself in the eyes of many voters" (New Zealand, Royal Commission 1986, 261) and detract from the legitimacy of, and importance surrounding, election day itself. While these are certainly nontrivial reservations, other countries with a significant amount of advance voting do not appear to suffer unduly in these regards.

And, in any event, surely the operative idea is not to redirect massive numbers of citizens from voting on ordinary polling day, but to provide opportunities to those who would be unlikely to vote. One gets the strong impression that few countries would ever rival the Swedish record for advance voting. But even if the numbers approached 10 percent, that would be significant. Moreover, it seems likely that higher levels of advance voting would suggest increasing participation among those who would otherwise be less likely to vote. In other words, at the upper limits of advance voting opportunities, when widespread availability translates into large numbers, it is likely that many of the less well off, normally unlikely voters, are being drawn into the political arena as well.

It is recommended that several more weeks of ordinary advance voting opportunities be provided.

It is also recommended that research be done concerning the possibility of post offices being used as advance polling stations as they are in Sweden. Without more research into the possibility, especially in connection with labour requirements and the overall costs (including whether franchised post office branches should be part of the network), it is unclear whether this would turn out to be a good idea or a bad idea. The notion has at least enough potential – perhaps lower overall election costs and greater accessibility for electors – to warrant some investigation.

It is recommended that the possibility of having post offices serve as advance polling stations be investigated.

Recommendations about Other Forms of Absentee Voting

If ample opportunities for advance voting were provided, then there would be less need for other provisions. Moreover, advance voting in person is less likely to involve fraud, which is possible with postal and proxy voting. However, there are certainly categories of citizens who would not be able to take advantage of advance voting opportunities and for whom additional provisions would clearly be necessary. One includes the elderly and the sick who do not reside in institutions but are homebound and are prevented from visiting the polling station in person. Another category comprises those individuals who are away from their district throughout the advance polling period, extended as it may be. Another group consists of those who find themselves unexpectedly outside of their area on election day. (Yet another category might be contemplated, in light of a possible change to Sunday voting, which is recommended below. Individuals who object to voting on the sabbath could vote in advance polls, but they might also be given the option of postal voting.)

The best argument seems to be for some limited form of postal voting to handle these categories. Given the concern with facilitating turnout, it is appropriate to indicate that the comparative information, as well as perhaps the Canadian experience with proxy voting, suggests that postal voting seems to deter fewer voters because it is a less complicated procedure. As well, some individuals may not always be able to name a proxy voter within whatever geographical boundaries are specified, and there is always the nagging question of whether the vote will be cast in accordance with the wishes of the elector. While fraud is possible with postal voting, this does not have to be the case if reasonable safeguards are implemented; this includes simply the signing of a declaration of voting eligibility, which is utilized in some countries with apparent success.

Presumably, the sick and the elderly would have to apply for the postal ballot papers (likely, a double envelope system) sometime during the campaign period and return the ballot by a certain day.[22] Those who are away throughout the campaign period and cannot avail themselves of advance voting opportunities should also be able to apply for a ballot from election officials in their constituency. The mailed-back ballot should also enclose a signed declaration of eligibility and of the inability to vote in person. Thought might be given to having a deadline for the return of the ballots a few days past the election (as long as the envelope bears a postmark no later than election day). Some countries allow for this, and it could service those electors who are unexpectedly out of their voting area on election day. They would be able to acquire postal ballot papers and return the papers to their constituency. A properly signed declaration can be scrutinized by election officials, who can carry out a check on whether the individual was registered before they count the ballot. Since most ballots would be counted on election day, it is unlikely that these late-arriving ballots would prevent the determination of most constituency outcomes.

While the latter process might be considered a bit complicated, it does away with having to set up the kind of facilities that other countries have to handle constituency transfer (which usually requires a permanent voters list). The virtue of this proposal is that only postal voting is added to advance voting as an additional, though limited, form of absentee balloting.

It is recommended that a limited form of postal voting, along the lines described, be adopted to accommodate those voters who are unable to vote in person.

Changes to Election Day Voting

There is reason to believe that these recommendations will lead to more turnout among a large variety of categories of Canadians, including those who are less advantaged. However, it is uncertain how many of the latter will be able to overcome the intellectual and bureaucratic demands associated with the provision of these forms of voting, minimal as they might be regarded by most. Indeed, it is not impossible that the participation gap might even be widened if these alternatives are disproportionately utilized by the more fortunate. It is, in part, for this reason that the analysis considers reforms that have the potential to facilitate turnout in a general way, including large numbers of less well-off citizens, who tend to vote less to begin with.

A major possible area of reform centres on when the vote is conducted and, relatedly, how many hours the polls are open. General elections in Canada are held on a single day, normally a Monday (Tuesday, if Monday is a holiday), and the polls are open for 11 hours, from 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM. This is not only the current practice, but also an apparently acceptable arrangement, according to the white paper and Bill C-79, since they make no allowances for change.

The days and hours of voting in the other 18 democracies are shown in table 3.20. The variation in number of hours provided for voting is

Table 3.20
Days and hours of election day voting in 18 democracies

Countries	Day(s)	Hours
Compulsory voting		
Australia	Saturday	10
Belgium	Sunday	5
Italy	Sunday & Monday	23
Voluntary voting		
Austria	Sunday	10
Denmark	Tuesday	11
Finland	Sunday & Monday	19
France	Sunday	10–12
Germany	Sunday	10
Ireland	Tuesday	12
Israel	Holiday	14
Japan	Sunday	11–13
Netherlands	Wednesday	11
New Zealand	Saturday	10
Norway	Sunday & Monday	Minimum of 10
Sweden	Sunday	12
Switzerland	Sunday	12
United Kingdom	Thursday	15
United States	Tuesday	Varies

Sources: See Appendix C.

striking among those nations. Belgium provides only five hours for its citizens to vote, while the polls in Italy are open for 23 hours over the course of two days – two entirely different perspectives on voting opportunity in compulsory systems. There is also a considerable range in hours among those countries that do not compel participation, though it is more modest: from 10 hours, in several countries, to 19 in Finland (over two days). However, the average is around 12 (not counting the United States), so the 11 hours that Canada provides its voters on election day is quite close to the democratic norm.

What is interesting, however, is the apparent lack of a relationship between higher turnout rates and an extensive number of hours. Indeed, for the voluntary voting countries other than Canada, there is actually a modest negative correlation between turnout and the number of hours of voting opportunity. This is probably a coincidental relationship; it is difficult to sustain the view that more voting opportunities serve as disincentives for individuals to vote. At the same time, this is hardly persuasive evidence for arguing that turnout can be augmented by expanding the number of hours available for voting. It would be more important to turn to other considerations surrounding election day.

The typical cross-national situation is, like Canada, a single day for polling, as can be seen in table 3.20. Among the other 18 democracies, 15 conduct elections on a single day; among the 15 voluntary voting countries, 13 do so. However, the Canadian case diverges from cross-national norms in two important respects. First of all, most countries, including most voluntary voting nations, have their elections on a rest day (or include a rest day along with a workday). Secondly, among the five countries setting aside one day during the week, none uses Monday. Denmark, Ireland and the United States organize their elections on a Tuesday; the Netherlands, on a Wednesday; and the United Kingdom, on a Thursday.

The principal recommendation to be made is for Sunday voting, but some might find the distribution of weekday voting in the five democracies suggestive of a less radical departure, namely, changing polling day from a Monday to any of the three midweek days. The literature appears to be quite silent on any connection with the enhancement of turnout. Nor is there sufficient variation to study the question empirically, given that only Canada has Monday voting, not to mention the fact that the five countries include low and high turnout systems. Nevertheless, turnout in Canada may suffer as a result of Monday voting because of the possibility that some potential voters turn the event into a long weekend, with employees perhaps stretching the four hours that they are entitled to have off into an entire day.

This is a possibility, but the more significant recommendation is tied to what most other democracies do, namely, organize the vote on a rest day. This is, by far, the democratic standard. Among the 15 single-day voting countries, 10 hold their elections on a rest day (on Sunday in seven cases); among the subset of 13 that have voluntary voting, eight use a rest day. But, of course, the three two-day voting polities that hold their elections both on a Sunday and a Monday can also be added. Altogether, then, 13 democracies allow their citizens to vote on a day of rest.

But does rest day voting enhance turnout? Arguments that it might would hinge, to a large extent, on the fact that most voters would have more time to cast their ballots. This would be especially true of the vast bulk of the population who are off work on that day. But the day of rest also provides more opportunities for families to make arrangements so that all adult members can visit the polling stations. Presumably, babysitting can be more easily arranged, and elderly members of the family can be escorted to the polling divisions. More generally, Sunday provides the time and circumstances to overcome what might be the "costs" of voting that deter some electors.

Table 3.21
Relationship between 1980s turnout and day of voting

	Voluntary voting countries		Compulsory voting countries
	Workday	Rest day	All rest day
15 democracies[a]	73.9	80.4	92.6 *(N = 3)*
N	*(5)*	*(10)*	
13 democracies[b]	79.4	84.0	
N	*(4)*	*(9)*	

Sources: See Appendix C, table 3.5.

Notes: Entries are cross-national mean rates based on average turnout in 1980s.

[a] Voluntary voting countries only, excluding Canada.

[b] Voluntary voting countries only, excluding Canada, Switzerland, the United States.

Evidence from the other democracies indicates that there is indeed an empirical connection between holding the election on a day of rest and higher levels of participation. For the 1980s, table 3.21 portrays the relationship pertaining to several different subsets of democracies, with Canada excluded each time. All three compulsory voting countries have day of rest voting, so the entry (92.6 percent) under this heading is offered merely for the sake of completeness. For the voluntary voting countries, the first row references the overall means for the two groups of five workday and ten rest day voting polities. Turnout in the former is a relatively low 73.9 percent, while it is a substantial 80.4 percent in the latter case – in other words, a marked difference of 6.5 percentage points. The corresponding (Pearson) correlation is .24. A noticeable gap remains, even if the arguably anomalous U.S. and Swiss cases are put to the side. The second row shows the shift upward in the means for both categories as these two low-turnout countries are removed from the analysis, but a difference of 4.6 percent still remains (and, interestingly, an increased correlation of .33). Either way, the evidence suggests that rest day voting democracies have higher turnout rates.

It might well be asked, however, if these differences are a function of other system factors and, in particular, some readers might have noticed that plurality systems are somewhat more predominant among work day voting countries. Indeed, there is a correlation of +.21 among the pool of 15 voluntary countries between plurality systems and workday voting. Given that results have already indicated that turnout is smaller in nonproportional systems, then there is the risk that the relationship between rest day voting and higher turnout is due to the impact of the electoral formulae. However, this does not seem to be the case. For the 15 countries, a partial correlation analysis involving controls for the electoral formulae produces a correlation that does drop somewhat, but not by very much – only from .24 to .17. For the subset of 13 countries, there is no change whatsoever in the correlation (.33). Rest day voting does appear to be at least modestly associated with higher turnout.[23]

Recommendation about Day of Rest Voting

Day of rest voting, in particular Sunday voting, should be implemented in Canadian general elections. It would probably serve to increase turnout in general and might help narrow the existing participation equality gap (or possibly prevent it from widening as a result of other reforms and recommendations that favour the better off). The fact that most countries, including countries with different religious make-ups, have day of rest voting provides the basis for justifying the decision and countering rebuttals that will surely arise. Certainly, the federal government would have to take the initiative in promoting and explaining the change. Presumably, the increase in turnout that should result makes it worthwhile to do so.

Anticipating more specific problems, four hours should still be available for those employees who must work on Sunday. For those who find it objectionable to vote on the sabbath, the absentee voting options (advance voting and possibly postal voting) represent an important solution.

It is recommended that Sunday voting be instituted for general elections in Canada.

Overseas Voting

The possibility of overseas voting implicates two categories of citizens who are outside their country – those who are temporarily absent, most likely on business or vacation, and those who are actually living or "residing" abroad. The bulk of the discussion to follow deals with the latter group of individuals, though there will be some commentary about those who are temporarily abroad.

Citizens Residing Abroad: Analysis and Recommendation

Canada has been moving in the direction of granting to its citizens living abroad the right to vote (in effect, extending a right already available to Canadian Forces personnel and people working abroad for External Affairs). This reformist bent has been widely welcomed, and deservedly so, given that it would remedy a violation of the principle of equality of citizenship. No doubt, if overseas voting is not made available before the next election, the government will continue to endure embarrassing publicity, just as it did in the last election when overseas students, in particular, complained bitterly about being disfranchised.

Recommendations that the *Canada Elections Act* be altered to provide the franchise to Canadian citizens living abroad were made by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections in June 1981 and then in June 1984. Reform in this area also characterized the white paper and Bill C-79. This is clearly in keeping with what the typical democracy provides and, indeed, no vote-facilitating provision has been as widely adopted as has this one.

Twelve of the 18 countries grant voting privileges to their nationals living abroad. The right to vote while living abroad is especially pronounced among the 15 voluntary voting countries; over two-thirds of these countries provide for the procedure, as seen in table 3.22. These

Table 3.22
Voting for overseas residents in 18 other democracies

Countries	Overseas residents can vote
Compulsory voting	
Australia	Yes
Belgium	No
Italy	No
Voluntary voting	
Austria	Yes
Denmark	Yes
Finland	Yes
France	Yes
Germany	Yes
Ireland	No
Israel	No
Japan	No
Netherlands	Yes
New Zealand	Yes
Norway	Yes
Sweden	Yes
Switzerland	No
United Kingdom	Yes
United States	Yes

Sources: See Appendix C.

include Austria, which only recently afforded the opportunity to its overseas citizens in time for the 1990 elections. Its implementation followed a court ruling that declared as unconstitutional the lack of a provision for overseas voting for Austrian citizens. The Austrian case, however, is but the latest instance of what appears to be a solid trend toward the adoption of overseas voting provisions. Thus, in 1980 Denmark expanded voting opportunities (beyond civil servants) to include students and those living abroad for health reasons. The Netherlands adopted the process for all overseas residents in 1983; similarly, Germany did so without restriction in 1985, as did the United Kingdom in 1987. Moreover, there is serious discussion among the Swiss about setting up a system to allow its overseas residents to vote.

So not only is voting by overseas residents available in a wide variety of countries, but the developing momentum surrounding its adoption suggests that it is quickly becoming a major characteristic of democratic life. Canada would be wise to follow through with its inclination to embrace the procedure.

The countries that do allow overseas voting do not all employ the same criteria of eligibility, particularly in connection with the degree of physical absence permitted. There are, however, some predominant patterns. Most of the democracies restrict the right to vote to individuals who have at some point lived in and/or have been "registered" in the country (Australia, Denmark, Germany, Norway, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom). A majority have no limit on the length of time that the individual can reside outside the country and still retain the right to vote (Austria, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United States), while among the others, the timeframe ranges from 20 years in the United Kingdom to three years in New Zealand. It was not possible to get complete information for each country about whether or not the overseas resident is required to signal that he or she eventually intends to return. The impression, however, is that most countries do not require this; indeed, the United Kingdom, in 1990, did away with the stipulation. Australia, however, remains an important exception.

There are reasonable arguments that can be made on behalf of both permissive and restrictive standards of eligibility. The most liberal regime would impose no residence requirements at all and would not prompt the individual to demonstrate some commitment to the country by declaring an intention to return. Presumably, this perspective would be supported by a strong view of citizenship equality, the pivotal consideration being the mere possession of citizenship, and not how well citizenship happened to match the history of, or intentions surrounding, residence.

On the other side there are arguments like the one made by Jacques Guilbault, MP, during the debate on second reading of Bill C-79: "Some people have Canadian citizenship just because they were born in Canada. They may have moved when they were only a few months old and may have never lived in Canada since then ... I do not think it is fair for someone who is not really a Canadian, although he may have Canadian citizenship, to have the right to vote" (Canada, House of Commons 1988, 13, 817).

Apprehension that overseas Canadians may not necessarily have a commitment to, or understanding of, the country and its political life also manifests itself in doubts about an unrestricted absence away from the country. The former chief electoral officer, Jean-Marc Hamel, in his 1989 Report, supported a time ceiling "so that only those Canadians who have an active involvement and interest in Canada would be able to exercise the right to vote" (Canada, Elections Canada 1989, 27). He suggested five years as an acceptable cut-off point.

Five years was also counselled by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections in both 1981 and 1984. However, the white paper recommended, without providing specific justification, that no time restriction be imposed, and this was indeed what Bill C-79 would have provided. However, other obligations would have been imposed to ensure that the right to vote was accompanied by some sort of "tie" with Canada. This included past residence at some point, a requirement that Guilbault considered problematic, and the individual's intention of returning to Canada.

It has already been noted that not having a limit on the permitted length of absence is the rule among a (slight) majority of democracies that offer voting rights to their citizens residing overseas. Among the other six, regulations vary widely. The United Kingdom permits a 20-year absence, though it is important to note that annual registration is required. Denmark allows 12 to 13 years to pass, and Germany allows 10 years, except if the country of residence is a member state in the Council of Europe, in which case no limit applies. Finally, Australia permits a four-year maximum; New Zealand, three years.

Canada, then, would be following the democratic norm by not imposing a limit, though the standard is not as strongly defined empirically as it could be. In any event, the nature of the registration process would ensure that the vote would be exercised by those inclined to maintain an attachment to Canadian politics. In particular, the right to vote would require prior listing on a registry to be maintained by the chief electoral officer, with the initiative for inclusion in the registry resting with the individual. What is more, to remain inscribed individuals would have to meet annual requests for information, and this would include, presumably, a reiteration of the intention to return to Canada.

Registration is, of course, universally required by all countries, but it is a complicated matter to discuss for the purpose of generating lessons for the Canadian case. The procedures themselves vary considerably, and, more importantly, overseas registration in many countries is tied to the domestic voting and population registration systems. As noted, however, the United Kingdom does require annual registration, a possible comparative justification for the Canadian intention in this regard.

Nor does a commonly ascribed-to mechanism for overseas voting exist among the democracies. According to Bill C-79, electors would receive ballot papers (a double envelope system) before the 28th day preceding ordinary polling day, and they would have to ensure that the papers were received by the chief electoral officer before 9:00 AM of election day. This can be done by post or through delivery to diplomatic missions. Among the other countries, four use a postal ballot (Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States); two allow for postal ballots or for voting at diplomatic missions (Australia, New Zealand); four allow for voting at missions only (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden); and two use a proxy system (France, the United Kingdom).[24] It would appear, then, that in contemplating postal and diplomatic mission voting, Canada would be providing more opportunities than most of the other countries.

The cross-national evidence indicates that whatever system is utilized to provide overseas residents with the right to vote, the contribution toward overall turnout will be marginal. While easier or more difficult registration processes may have some bearing on the numbers who do vote, likely the strongest explanation for the large numbers of overseas citizens who do not vote is simply indifference.

Certainly, the potential numbers are quite large. Austrian embassy officials (1990, communiqué) estimate that about 400 000 of their fellow citizens live abroad. Yet, only about 39 000 of them voted in the 1990 elections. Dutch officials estimate that there are about 650 000 of their citizens outside the country (either living or temporarily abroad), among whom perhaps 550 000 would be eligible to vote if they registered. However, only 23 598 registered in connection with the 1989 election (Netherlands, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 1991, communiqué). The "gap" is even greater in other countries, such as the United

Kingdom, where estimates are given of about 2 1/4 million citizens abroad (exclusive of "service workers"); yet in the 1987 election, somewhere in the order of only 11 000 to 12 000 of such people registered to vote (United Kingdom, Home Office 1990, communiqué).

Now it could be argued that there are reasons for the low levels of registration and voting in these particular countries. After all, overseas voting is new in Austria (1990) and in the United Kingdom (1987), and the Dutch appear to have a quite complicated registration system. Yet other countries with more established systems and easier registration processes do not have especially different patterns. For example, in Sweden, registration for overseas voting has been in place since the 1970 election – see table 3.23 for the relevant data. While these figures can be judged to be low in absolute terms, a Swedish study in 1975 estimated the number of Swedish citizens living abroad who were potentially eligible to vote at 75 000 (1990, communiqué). This estimate can be juxtaposed against the 7 096 who were actually registered for the 1976 election to demonstrate that less than 10 percent of the eligible were registered. There is no evidence that this proportion has increased dramatically over time. On the other hand, as can be seen, there is some evidence that the proportion of the registered who do vote has dropped over time.

The hardest data about overseas turnout levels are available for the Finnish case. Not only do government officials keep separate tabs on the number of overseas votes cast in Finland's parliamentary elections, but they actually keep a population registry of citizens living

Table 3.23
Registration and voting of Swedish overseas residents, 1970–88

	Numbers		
Election	Registered	Voting	% voting
1970	1 721	1 462	85.0
1973	3 875	3 422	88.3
1976	7 096	6 331	89.2
1979	15 319	12 258	80.0
1982	16 889	13 679	81.0
1985	17 301	13 969	80.7
1988	18 581	13 513	72.7

Source: Swedish National Tax Board.

abroad (and, by virtue of this fact, are registered to vote). Thus, it is possible to get a fairly exact picture of the proportion of Finns worldwide who vote. The percentages of overseas voters are not large. In the 1975 elections, only 7.1 percent of the 305 972 eligible Finns who lived abroad at that time actually voted; in both 1979 and 1983, 6.7 percent did so (among the 306 175 and 281 691 abroad, respectively); in the last election, in 1987, 5.8 percent of the 247 378 eligible voted (Finland 1991, communiqué). Thus, not only are the percentages meagre, but they are on the decrease, as in the Swedish case. This probably signifies that as time passes, those who are outside the country become less and less committed to the country and interested in Finnish politics. The fact that fewer and fewer citizens are in the register – the current (1991) register lists 228 826 Finns – probably reflects the acquisition of other citizenships. The Swedish and Finnish data on diminishing turnout levels over time might be seen as justification for the requirement that overseas citizens should indicate some degree of ongoing connection with the home country, such as an annual registration process that includes a reiteration of the declaration to return. It would appear that with the passage of time, interest in the home country does wane, so restricting the vote to those who persist in maintaining the link is defensible.

The other message for the Canadian case associated with these comparative data is the expectation of a small effect on overall turnout levels in Canada. While the fact that there are no reliable data about the number of Canadians living abroad makes it problematic to estimate the impact in any event, the cross-national lesson seems clear that the reform of overseas voting is not a matter of quantity. Indeed, given that there is a problem of turnout in Canada, it is not entirely inappropriate to take steps to ensure that the implementation of overseas voting does not lead to lower overall turnout levels. This concern speaks positively to the registration requirements envisioned in Bill C-79, specifications that increase the likelihood that those who do register will be motivated to vote as well.

The only matter that might be investigated as a possible variation on what that bill provides is registration renewal every two or three years. There may be economies in doing so without a great loss in what the process seeks to ensure: an ongoing link between the overseas voter and attachment to Canadian politics.

It is recommended that the provisions for overseas voting as envisioned in Bill C-79 be implemented; the possibility of a two- or three-year interval for registration renewal should be considered if there are significant economies involved.

Recommendation about Citizens Temporarily Abroad

While Bill C-79 deserves praise for moving in this major direction of reform, it can be questioned about its silence with regard to the other category of overseas citizens, those who are temporarily abroad on business or holiday. The comparative data indicate that Canada is quite distinctive in moving in only one direction of reform. Every country listed in table 3.22, except Belgium, provides the right to vote to both categories of their overseas citizenry. To be sure, the mechanics vary considerably – sometimes the same registration procedures apply, sometimes not – but the right is provided. Canada stands out, then, among the democracies in providing only a partial solution to the problem of overseas voters.

The response, it is believed, does not lie in establishing a special register, but in pursuing other areas of reform, already recommended. Expanded opportunities for advance voting would certainly be helpful for those who can predict their absences and find that they are still in the country to take advantage of those opportunities. For others, postal voting from abroad could be a possibility. Presumably, ballots could be acquired from diplomatic missions (or even from the constituency's officials), and procedural safeguards could be implemented to ensure the integrity of the process.

It might also be reasonable to think about a more permissive registration process for those who are outside the country during the enumeration period. Just as voting-day registration can be seriously contemplated, so, too, can the idea of allowing those who are temporarily abroad to register to vote (upon the presentation of suitable identification and/or a declaration of some kind).

It is recommended that procedures be adopted providing the right to register and vote for those Canadians who are temporarily abroad.

Messenger Voting, Assisted Voting and Special Polling Stations

The need to contemplate these sorts of vote-facilitating provisions derives from the obligation to be fair and equitable to particularly susceptible groups, the sick and aged. In this vein, the implications for increased turnout should be of secondary concern. At the same time, though, it must be recognized that these categories comprise a not insignificant number of citizens. According to the 1981 census, for example, about 2.3 million Canadians were 65 years of age or older; of these individuals, about 158 000 lived in nursing homes and institutions for the elderly and chronically ill. Another 19 000 lived in hospitals and similar institutions (Canada, Statistics Canada 1984, table 3). As for the hospitalized (regardless of age), the figures are a bit more problematic to interpret in relation to voting considerations because of the variable length of stay. Certainly, however, there is the potential that at any given time, an election can be held when very large numbers of Canadians are in hospitals. Across the country as a whole, there were 3 644 520 hospital admissions during the 1988–89 period (Canada, Statistics Canada 1989, table 5); the average length of stay was 14.16 days, though for some hospitals, such as extended-care institutions, the average was 290.58 days (ibid., table 7). The other point to bear in mind concerns the future. Voting opportunities for the elderly and the sick will become increasingly important as the population's age profile in Canada continues to shift upward.

Messenger Voting

Messenger voting is one possible means of ensuring that the sick and elderly are able to exercise their franchise, and it is the only mechanism of the three that Canada does not provide for. Nor has it been discussed as a reform. However, Canada is not alone, for few countries provide for messenger voting. Denmark, New Zealand and Sweden allow it (see table 3.24), generally, for those prevented from visiting the polling station for reasons of illness, disability or advanced age. Even so, the procedures differ. In Sweden special formalities and envelopes are used, and the ballot is carried by a husband or wife or rural mail carrier. In Denmark, upon application, two official representatives of the commune take the ballot to the elector's home, witness the vote and then take it back to the polling station.

No data are available on the numbers who rely on this method of voting, but it hardly seems likely that the totals would be large. In part, this is so because these three countries have alternative provisions, such as assisted voting for the blind and the handicapped, as well as special polling stations set up in homes for the aged (see below).

Assisted Voting

Both at advance polls and on ordinary polling day, Canadians who are blind or otherwise incapacitated and in need of assistance in the casting of their votes can be helped by the deputy returning officer or friends or relatives. This is quite clearly the democratic standard, judging by the other democracies, as seen in table 3.24. Information is incomplete for three countries, but among the others, only Austria does not furnish a form of assistance to those who are handicapped. (In the United States there are such provisions, but they vary from state to state.)

While the cross-national experience supports the case for providing ample assistance to individuals to vote in person, it should be noted that the momentum in Canada for a more progressive approach is well under way. Bill C-79 would have required that polls be more conveniently situated for the handicapped, including the important provision of level access. This would have replaced the current and looser terminology, that there be ease of access. The white paper also argued for the establishment of level access at all advance polls, a provision accepted by the drafters of Bill C-79.

Special Polling Stations

In the Canadian case, the categories of individuals who are subject to "special voting rules" – military electors, public service electors, the eligible dependents of both and veteran electors in hospitals or institutions – could be listed under this rubric. The arrangements for those who are overseas (military and civil service categories) are clearly quite distinctive and involve the use of double envelopes, requiring the ballots to be mailed back to the individual's constituency. In the case of veterans, special returning officers visit the facilities and collect votes where veterans reside.

Table 3.24
Messenger voting, assisted voting and special polling stations in 18 democracies

Countries	Messenger voting	Assisted voting	Special polling stations
Compulsory voting			
Australia	—	Yes	Yes
Belgium	—	Yes	—
Italy	—	Yes	Yes
Voluntary voting			
Austria	—	—	Yes
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	—	Yes	Yes
France	—	Yes	—
Germany	—	Yes	—
Ireland	—	Yes	—
Israel	—	n.a.	—
Japan	—	Yes	—
Netherlands	n.a.	Yes	Yes
New Zealand	Yes	n.a.	Yes
Norway	n.a.	Yes	—
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	n.a.	n.a.	—
United Kingdom	—	Yes	—
United States	—	Varies	—

Sources: See Appendix C.

n.a. = not available.

For the institutionalized population at large, the current law provides a sense that polling stations might be "established in a sanatorium, a home for the aged, a chronic hospital or a similar institution for the care and treatment of tuberculosis or other chronic diseases..." (Canada, *Canada Elections Act*, s. 138(1)). Provision is made for election officials, if need be, to go from room to room to collect the votes of the residents. It also seems that the commitment to facilitate the voting of the institutionalized is fairly strong. For example, instructions issued to returning officers before the last election talked about setting up polling divisions in institutions where the numbers warrant so "residents or patients of these institutions should normally not have to leave the building to cast their votes" (Canada, Elections Canada 1987, 8). Instructions with regard to smaller institutions suggest setting up the polling station in those settings to service residents of the institution and surrounding (ordinary) dwellings.

Bill C-79 contained two provisions that would further establish voting opportunities for the hospitalized and institutionalized. The special rules governing the process of voting for hospitalized veteran electors were to be done away with. Presumably, this would have strengthened the commitment to bring polling stations to all those who were institutionalized. In addition, and importantly, there was explicit reference to the establishment of mobile polling stations.

It was not possible to gather information detailed enough about the provision of special polling stations in other democracies to tell which countries had mobile polls. The data shown in table 3.24 are therefore quite summary and simply indicate whether or not special polls are available. Typically, the provisions are for those who are hospitalized and in old age homes; in a few instances, prisoners, including those awaiting trial, are able to vote in special polls (Italy, Denmark, Finland, Sweden). What is striking is that a majority of the democracies do not provide special voting facilities. Only eight nations go out of their way to facilitate the voting of their more vulnerable citizens. To be sure, many countries that do not provide for special polling stations allow for assisted voting, so there is some compensation. Nevertheless, this is of little comfort to those who are not mobile.

Recommendations about Messenger Voting, Assisted Voting and Special Polling Stations

Canada is already heading in the right direction in allowing many of its institutionalized citizens to vote, and, as has been seen, is seriously contemplating expanded opportunities. It is, therefore, noncontroversial to recommend supporting the changes envisioned by Bill C-79, especially with regard to mandated level access at polling stations and the establishment of mobile polls. Not only are these changes simply proper in their own right, but their implementation, especially mobile polls, would put Canada in the vanguard among contemporary industrial democracies.

It is recommended that the provisions envisioned in Bill C-79 with regard to mandated level access and mobile polls be implemented.

It is also not particularly controversial to point out the virtue of maintaining assisted voting. Messenger voting is a possibility to consider as well, since existing and contemplated provisions would not necessarily help the elderly who live on their own, but who are homebound or who are partially mobile. However, the recommendation for the implementation of postal voting could easily cover this need, and, in fact, this could be viewed as another argument in its favour.

It is recommended that assisted voting be maintained and that postal voting be allowed for people who are homebound due to illness, and for the elderly or physically disabled.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that analyses of the possibility of reforms in the voting context take seriously into account the need to address the problem of turnout in Canada.

It is recommended that registration on voting day be permitted, within a framework that does not undermine the ordinary registration process and yet provides additional opportunities to those missed by that process.

It is recommended that several more weeks of ordinary advance voting opportunities be provided.

It is recommended that the possibility of having post offices serve as advance polling stations be investigated.

It is recommended that a limited form of postal voting be adopted to accommodate those voters who are unable to vote in person.

It is recommended that Sunday voting be instituted for general elections in Canada.

It is recommended that the provisions for overseas voting as envisioned in Bill C-79 be implemented; the possibility of a two- or three-year interval for registration renewal should be considered if there are significant economies involved.

It is recommended that procedures be adopted providing the right to register and vote for those Canadians who are temporarily abroad.

It is recommended that the provisions envisioned in Bill C-79 with regard to mandated level access and mobile polls be implemented.

It is recommended that assisted voting be maintained and that postal voting be allowed for people who are homebound due to illness, and for the elderly or physically disabled.

APPENDIX A

For Eagles (1991), the biggest potential problem is the ecological fallacy and, taken to its extreme, the possibility that the relationships he observes at the constituency level would simply not manifest themselves at the individual level. However, based on a close reading of his results and this writer's own general experience with aggregate-to-individual level inferences, it seems highly unlikely that his conclusions are spurious, particularly in connection with the low income–low turnout association (given that income matters in all three regression analyses/elections examined). Moreover, there is, of course, a range of comparative literature to support the natural expectation that poorer people do participate less. This said, Eagles' use of aggregate data has probably led him to exaggerate, to some unknown degree, the strength of the relationship. Indeed, on the basis of the (same) theoretical literature and what is known about the Canadian case, an overwhelmingly strong relationship would not be expected; after all, a government-led registration process ensures that individual skills and resources do not fully explain voting and, of course, many poor people do indeed vote.

There are two features in Pammett's (1991) analysis that probably lead to an underestimation of the importance of socio-economic correlates for turnout. First, his use of survey data has probably constrained the emergence of an appreciable relationship. Pammett, himself, notes the well-known fact that turnout is typically overreported in surveys for two reasons – because the politically uninterested are less likely to participate both in surveys and in elections and because "some survey respondents will untruthfully report voting, either out of embarrassment at not having done so, or out of a desire to please the interviewer" (Pammett 1991, 2). Insofar as the less well off in the sample are probably more interested in politics than the less well off in the population as a whole, the former's higher levels of turnout will produce an attenuated relationship between socio-economic standing and turnout. (This assumes, rightly, it is believed, that the better off in the sample more accurately represent their population counterparts.) A flattening of the relationship would also result if, as is likely, the less well off in the sample are more prone to falsely report having voted. Correlations can also be depressed by random error associated with reliability problems, and it is certainly not unthinkable that the merged dataset (Gallup surveys 1984–85) that Pammett uses has such problems – given that some individuals were asked to recall whether or not they voted up to a year after the fact. To be sure, in the combined sample, the percentage reporting that they did not vote (19 percent) is closer to the true figure than estimates produced by the 1984 National Election Study, but this does not completely rule out the possibility of some reliability error. So for these three reasons – or perhaps more accurately, these three possible reasons – it is probable that the relationships involving socio-economic variables and turnout that Pammett reports are underestimates of their true strength in the population.

Even so, Pammett underemphasizes the importance of those relationships that do emerge, a second limiting feature of his analysis. His table 2.A3, which shows only statistically significant betas from an otherwise all-inclusive regression analysis, indicates that age, the variable he stresses the most, and rightfully so, exerts the strongest impact on turnout; in particular, being in the two youngest categories (compared to the oldest category) is what matters the most in accounting for variations in turnout (betas of –.17 and –.18). However, after this, variables representing the two lowest education categories, as well as the lowest income category, are among the most important predictors (betas of –.09, –.07 and –.06, respectively). That education emerges as relevant is interesting in and of itself, not because its impact is very strong – its effects are modest – but because the initial, i.e., zero-order education–turnout relationship is virtually nonexistent. This suggests that some important confounding effects are operative, particularly as they are bound up with age. One explanation, consistent with the pattern of results observed, is that the original education–turnout relationship is suppressed, cancelled out by the simultaneity of a positive age–turnout relationship and a negative age–education association. Some impact on the part of education may be apparent when the suppressor variable, age, is controlled.

A more conventional interpretation follows from parts of Pammett's table 2.A2, which shows turnout levels by age and education. The impact of education on turnout clearly varies across the age categories and in marked fashion. Among the older segments of the population, education has a very minor impact, with typically four or five percentage points separating turnout levels in the lowest and highest education categories. In contrast, among the two youngest groups, the impact of education is indicated by differences of 21 percent and 29 percent. This interaction-like effect, furthermore, has been substantiated in U.S. studies (e.g., Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978) – though there is a stronger education effect in that country because of the more stringent registration requirements. This multivariate pattern, moreover, makes a lot of sense: noneducated people can, over time, learn by the experience of sustained exposure to politics and thus catch up to educated people in participation domains.

Pammett is aware of these interaction effects but does not try to model them. It is suspected that the use of interaction terms in his regression analysis (or more simply, the running of regressions for different combinations of traits) would have indicated a more important role for education. Again, such stronger evidence as might have emerged would still not fully represent what is the true impact in the population – because of the survey-connected methodological problems already cited.

These, then, are the main points that suggest that the impact of socio-economic variables, while perhaps not as weighty as indicated by Eagles' analysis, is stronger than indicated by Pammett's.

There is perhaps a final point of importance to note in connection with Eagles' work, specifically, his finding that income bears a consistently significant negative relationship to turnout. This may be due to an operationalization of income that directly captures the subtle effect of income. As Wolfinger and Rosenstone point out, it is only among the low-income groups that turnout differences are noticeable: "Income affects turnout only to the point where a modestly comfortable standard of living has been attained. Once this threshold has been reached, more money has no additional impact on the likelihood of voting. The very rich are no more likely to vote than are those with middle incomes" (1980, 34). Eagles (1991) does not supply specifics, but his income variable is measured as the "proportion of low income families in each riding." This is supported by Pammett's (1991) regression analysis, which shows betas dropping off across the increasing income categories –.05, –.04, –.02, –.01, –.01 (relative to the top income category). Turnout inequality may, in other words, be especially apparent for the very poor.

APPENDIX B

Elections and sources for turnout data for 18 democracies

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
Australia	1946, 49	1951, 54, 55, 58	1961, 63, 66, 69	1972, 74, 75, 77	1980, 83, 84, 87
Austria	1945, 49	1953, 56, 59	1962, 66	1970, 71 75, 79	1983, 86
Belgium	1946, 49	1950, 54, 58	1961, 65, 68	1971, 74, 77, 78	1981, 85, 87
Denmark	1945, 47	1950, 53, 57	1960, 64, 66, 68	1971, 73, 75 77, 79	1981, 84 87, 88
Finland	1945, 48	1951, 54, 58	1962, 66	1970, 72, 75, 79	1983, 87
France[a]	—	—	1965, 69	1974	1981, 88
Germany	1949	1953, 57	1961, 65, 69	1972, 76	1980, 83, 87
Ireland	1948	1951, 54, 57	1961, 65, 69	1973, 77	1981, 82 (Feb.), 82 (Nov.), 87
Israel	1949	1951, 55, 59	1961, 65, 69	1973, 77	1981, 84, 88
Italy	1946, 48	1953, 58	1963, 68	1972, 76, 79	1983, 87
Japan	1946, 47, 49	1952, 53, 55, 58	1960, 63, 67, 69	1972, 76, 79	1980, 83, 86
Netherlands	1946, 48	1952, 56, 59	1960, 63, 67	1971, 72, 77	1981, 82, 86, 89
New Zealand	1946, 49	1951, 54, 57	1960, 63, 66, 69	1972, 75, 78	1981, 84, 87
Norway	1945, 49	1953, 57	1961, 65, 69	1973, 77	1981, 85, 89
Sweden	1948	1952, 56, 58	1960, 64, 68	1970, 73, 76, 79	1982, 85, 88
Switzerland	1947	1951, 55, 59	1963, 67	1971, 75, 79	1983, 87
United Kingdom	1945	1950, 51, 55, 59	1964, 66	1970, 74 (Feb.), 74 (Oct.), 79	1983, 87
United States[a]	1948	1952, 56	1960, 64, 68	1972, 76	1980, 84, 88

Sources: Mackie and Rose (1982); *European Journal of Political Research*, *Electoral Studies*.

Note: Turnout based on registration figures, except for the United States (voting-age population).

[a] Presidential elections (French turnout averaged over two rounds).

APPENDIX C
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ABBREVIATIONS

am.	amended
c.	chapter
R.S.C.	Revised Statutes of Canada
s(s).	section(s)
S.C.	Statutes of Canada
Supp.	Supplement

NOTES

This study was completed in June 1991.

The author wishes to acknowledge and thank profoundly the three McGill research assistants who worked so diligently on this study: Maurice Dufour, David Hagen and Brian O'Neal. Comments made by the two assessors and discussions with Herman Bakvis and Elisabeth Gidengil were very useful for clarifying some facets of the analysis. Thanks are also owed to André Blais for making available the Blais and Carty data set on turnout. Even though independent data were gathered for this study, that data set helped to inform the data-gathering process. It is also appropriate to thank those government officials, both Canadian and foreign, who went out of their way to provide information used for this study. Finally, the author wishes to express his gratitude to Susan Bartlett for an excellent typing job performed under considerable pressure.

1. The story behind this headline cites a recent study by the U.S. Library of Congress that appears to rank Canada's recent levels of voter turnout in 23rd position among the 28 democracies considered. Efforts to find the document for use in this present study were unsuccessful, but, as will become clear, an independent analysis undertaken here shows a similar situation of "failure."

2. Australia and New Zealand compel their citizens to take the initiative to register. For France, Powell (1980) reports that registration is left to the voluntary initiative of the citizenry but is nevertheless facilitated because the French are required to register in order to receive their identification cards. Contacts with consulate officials, however, indicated no connection between the two registration processes. Moreover, they claimed that France, in fact, does make voting registration mandatory; the quirk is that the country foresees no sanctions for those who fail to register!

3. Even from a rank-order view, some Canadian scholars seriously understate how poor the Canadian turnout record really is. Mishler and Clarke (1990) make reference to Crewe's (1981) study, which shows that, in one listing, Canada ranks in 12th position out of 16 compulsory voting countries and, in another, in 20th position. Yet the two authors report only partial results: "Canada ranks behind several of these countries, but compares favourably with others such as Japan, Switzerland, India, and particularly the United States" (ibid., 161); indeed, they appear to find these results for the Canadian case "impressive" (ibid., 162).

4. The evidence that may be adduced with regard to the impact of political cultural variables on Canadian turnout points in different directions. On the one hand, there are data that indicate that Canadians, relative to many other democratic populations, tend to have appropriate political attitudes, especially partisanship and political efficacy, that are conducive to participation (Black 1990). The same source indicates that Canadians also fare

well when other forms of political activity besides turnout are considered. This suggests that Canadian political culture cannot be characterized, at least in comparative terms, as nonparticipant and thus cannot constitute an explanation of low turnout rates. Indeed, this line of thinking suggests that turnout is the anomalous participation activity, an anomaly explained by specific (vote-inhibiting) institutional factors. On the other hand, there is an analysis of 16 democracies by Crepaz (1990), that finds that party polarization and the presence of a postmaterialist party are strong predictors of turnout (and stronger than some institutional variables). If these can be taken as indicators of "political culture," then the Canadian case, with its lower degree of party polarization and absence of a postmaterial party (in the legislature), suggests a culture that inhibits turnout.

5. De facto population figures are generally understood to include all persons physically present in the country or area at the reference date, while de jure counts are based on all the usual residents whether or not they were actually physically present there at the reference date. See the United Nations *Demographic Yearbooks*.

6. The sources of the Canadian turnout data are the various reports of the chief electoral officer. Alas, there is an additional matter to raise about numerators and denominators. Official turnout figures reported in percentage terms, at the nationwide level, have been rounded off so only whole numbers are presented. This is an unfortunate loss of precision because half percentages would represent a significant pool of individuals; moreover, without the knowledge of whether the figures were rounded up or down, judgements about changes over time may be slightly cruder than they have to be. What is uncertain is whether or not the rounding exercise might have (slightly) understated the actual turnout rates. On the other hand, the same summary tables provide actual registration and vote totals, but these cannot be divided to get the decimal precision desired. This is because the denominator, the number of "electors on the list," does not include veteran electors or the dependents of Canadian forces and public service electors, even though their votes are included in the total ballots cast. The percentage thus obtained would slightly overstate the actual turnout rates. Most of the time the discrepancies between the two percentages are slight, but not always. The largest difference emerges in the 1958 general election. The reported official percentage is 79 percent, but dividing the indicated vote total (7 357 139) by the registration total (9 131 200) yields a figure of 80.6 percent. In this case, the logic of the situation suggests that the former figure is more accurate. Attempts at discerning the reasons for discrepancies, including contacts with Elections Canada, did not lead to any clear-cut answers.

7. The failure to take into account these intra-seasonal variations probably explains why Eagles (1991) finds no evidence of a connection between turnout and season.

8. With regard to the second turn in the data – the decline in turnout over the last two decades – the explanation may be rooted in the coming of age of Canada's baby boomers. Since Canada had one of the largest post-war baby booms among industrial societies (Kettle 1980) and since it is known that young people generally vote less (e.g., Pammett 1991), this argument has plausibility. Indeed, in the 1974 election, for example, nearly one-third of all eligible voters were under the age of 30 (Clarke et al. 1979, 382–83). However, there is still some uncertainty about this proposition. Turnout in the 1972 election, the first election held after the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18, was actually a percentage point higher than in the 1968 election (77 percent versus 76 percent). Turnout did drop considerably (to 71 percent) in the next election (1974), but there is a rival explanation to the age factor: the simple point that the election was held in July. Indeed, if the 1974 and 1980 out-of-season elections are put to the side, the decline is decidedly more modest.

   Yet another proposition that might be speculated upon in connection with the participation decline involves the entry into the electorate of the many immigrants who came to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. The argument here is presumably that such individuals, once they did become eligible to vote by acquiring citizenship, participated less and for a variety of reasons (because they were accustomed to other political systems, because they avoided politics, because of the marginality associated with their minority status, etc.). However, what research there is on the subject suggests that immigrants do eventually participate as much as the Canadian-born (Black 1982, 1984, 1991).

9. See also the rankings provided by Jackman (1987) and Powell (1984, 1986).

10. Compulsory voting was abolished in the Netherlands in 1970.

11. For the U.S. case, the registration arrangements in most states account for a significant part of the relatively low turnout levels over time. For various explanations of the deterioration in turnout, see, for example, Cassel and Luskin (1988), Piven and Cloward (1988) and Teixeira (1987). Swiss turnout has generally been low because of purposeful demobilization among the federal parties (Przeworski 1975). "Since the late 1930s, the four major parties, each linked to a cleavage group, have guaranteed themselves roughly equal place in the shared collective national executive, which has a rotating chairmanship. Unless a new party should suddenly break into the big four, the electoral outcomes at the national level are virtually meaningless ... Moreover, most important policy decisions are made at the Cantonal level" (Powell 1980, 20). The persistence of these disincentives, cumulating over time, could also account for the deterioration in turnout.

12. The census counted 1 024 300 individuals who were not Canadian citizens, but it did not report age breakdowns for these people. To arrive at

an estimate of the age-eligible among these individuals, the figure 75 percent was used, the proportion of the population 18 years of age and older as a whole. This leads to an estimate of about 768 225, a figure that should be subtracted from the estimate of the total age-eligible population in 1988 (19 093 419). Other sources provided updated information to take into account changes in the population of citizens for 1987 and 1988. The number of immigrants who arrived in those two years is 314 027; these were individuals, of course, who could not fulfil the three-year citizenship residency requirement. Assuming that 75 percent of these individuals were "age-eligible" produces a figure of 235 520, which should also be subtracted from the 1988 voting age population estimate. Finally, it is necessary to update the 1986 census figure for noncitizens (1 024 300). In 1987 and 1988, 132 448 individuals acquired their Canadian citizenship; 75 percent of this figure should be added to the voting-age population estimate.

13. It might be noted that this result is obtained only for the 24 countries for which social group–parties linkage data are available.

14. As well, for France, the turnout figures used here are taken from the legislative elections in the 1980s (omitting the unusual 1986 election that was fought under PR). This is necessary because some of the key independent variables considered here (e.g., unicameralism–bicameralism variations) pertain not to presidential outcomes but to legislative outcomes. This is an error that Jackman, for instance, commits.

15. The measure displayed in the results is based on the effective number of parties contesting the election. An alternative measure, based on the effective number of parties winning seats in the legislature, was also employed, but produced the same (unspectacular) results.

16. See note 11.

17. Ballots are mailed by the officials in charge to the district where the voter is registered. Advance voting in Denmark is also known as "postal voting," but only because the ballots are mailed back to the districts of registration; indeed, Danes do not vote in post offices but in municipal registration offices.

18. Currently 14 days, translating into 112 hours, are available for voting in the office of the returning officer, while the three days of advance voting provide for a total of 24 hours.

19. Indeed, it might seem particularly difficult to contemplate a positive advance voting–turnout relationship, given that overall turnout in Canada has not increased in the last few elections (even though larger numbers of citizens are making use of advance voting opportunities). A possible rebuttal is that advance voting opportunities have helped to offset other forces that would have led by themselves to lower turnout levels than actually seen.

20. Turnout did generally increase throughout the relevant periods. In the 1960s, 86.4 percent of the eligible voted, while in the 1970s, 90.4 percent did so (turnout dropped ever so slightly in the 1980s to 89.1 percent). As can be imagined, it is difficult to attribute increases in turnout precisely to the advance voting process, though at least one author, writing about the 1970 election, alludes to a connection (Forsell 1971, 204). The general difficulty is that the 1970s also witnessed a series of other institutional changes, as well as important political developments that could themselves explain the increase. Along with the implementation of a wide-open system of advance voting in 1970, there was, importantly, a change to a unicameral system of representation, which Jackman specifically argues increased turnout in Sweden (1987, 415). That same year saw the introduction of a simultaneous election day for all levels of government – a move that could have increased turnout, on the assumption that new importance had been given to election day. There were also some significant political developments (e.g., Sainsbury 1984) that were mostly translated into the increasing competitiveness of elections as the Social Democrats lost support throughout this period, indeed losing power in 1976 after 44 years. In essence, throughout most of the 1970s, there was the sense that a real change of government seemed possible and this might also have contributed to the higher turnout levels. (On Swedish electoral politics in this period, see Lindstrom 1982; Petersson 1974, 1978; and Sarlvik 1977).

    However, if it is difficult to point to advance voting as being directly (or singularly) responsible for the increase in turnout, it may still be possible to argue that were it not for significant advance voting opportunities in place, some of the increase in motivation to vote flowing from these other institutional and political factors might not have been translated into ballots actually cast.

21. In rural areas, according to Bill C-79, a proxy certification would not be required. Rather, the vote could be exercised on the basis of an appointment of a proxy voter form properly signed and witnessed.

22. Perhaps the enumerators could perform this task during the course of their regular duties – a suggestion made by Brian O'Neal, one of the research assistants for this study.

23. When a rest day versus workday variable is added to the multivariate models examined in the previous section (data not shown), its impact turns out to be very modest (between one and three percentage points); moreover, the result is not statistically significant. However, it might be unwise to conclude from this that rest day voting has no impact. There is after all a considerable chance of "statistical noise" associated with those models, in part because of the limited number of cases.

24. For presidential elections, France sets up special consular centres where the size of the expatriate populations warrants.

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Herman Bakvis, Editor

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ISBN 1-55002-111-7

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